the weekly Standard

JUNE 8, 1998 • $2.95

BIBI'S ENDGAME
CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

A Jerk and His Camera

Michael Moore—Left-Wing Filmmaker, Populist Agitator, Phony

by Matt Labash

Beijing Bill Clinton
FRUM · NORDLINGER · THE EDITORS

Reading Oscar Wilde
DAVID SKINNER

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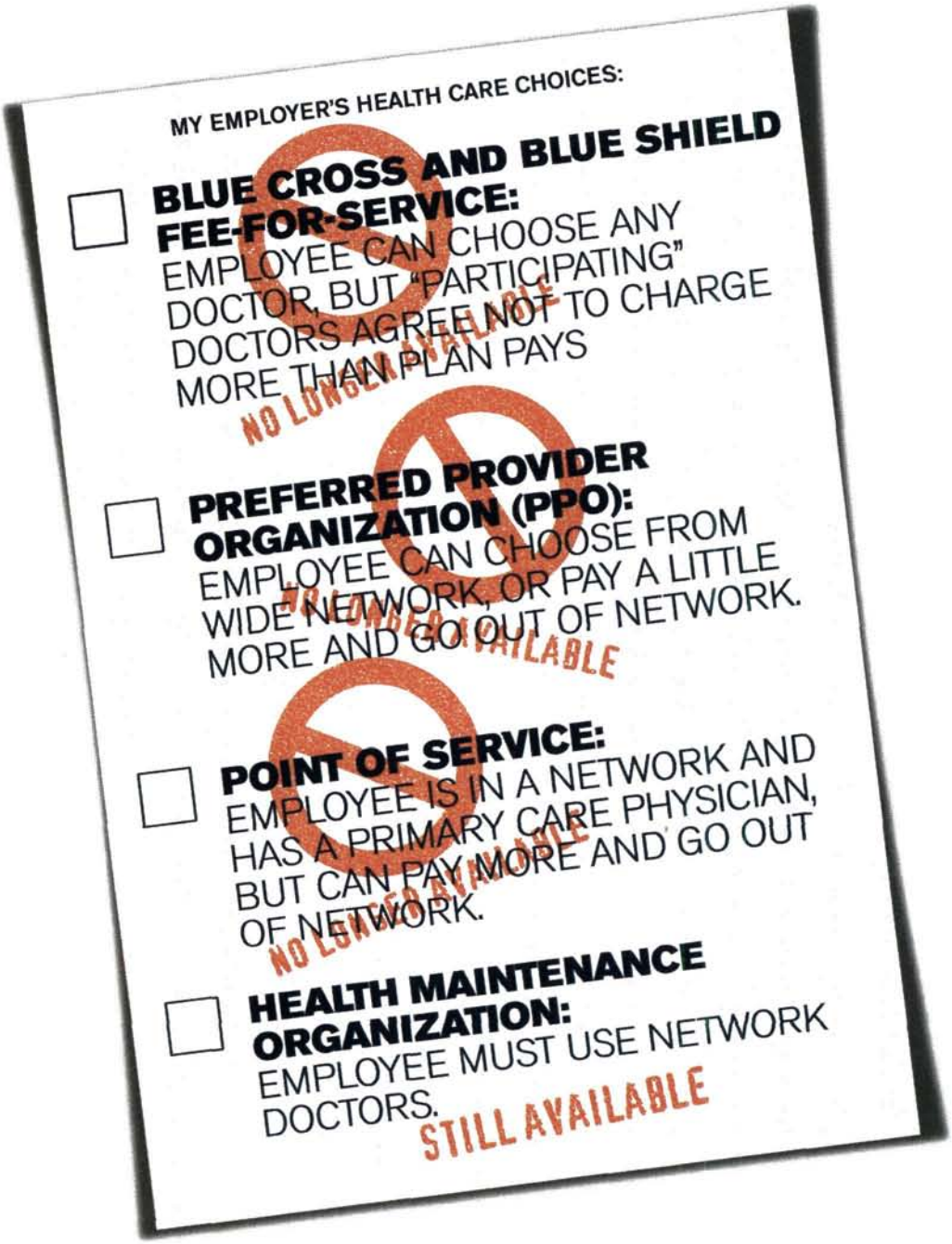
The Future of America's Health Care—

Choice... What Choice?



Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans currently offer a broad range of health plans, including fee-for-service (with participating doctors), Preferred Provider Organizations (PPO), Point of Service (POS) and HMOs.

However, we're alarmed that Congress could soon end our ability to offer any product but an HMO.

It's an election year and Congress is rushing to regulate all private health plans by enacting requirements that reflect the way we do business in our HMO products. But we cannot meet these requirements in our other products unless we change them dramatically.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield fears these requirements will make it very difficult, probably impossible, to continue to offer health plans with a large number of physicians to choose from... or health plans that allow our members to go outside our network – for example, PPOs.

These congressional proposals are a far-reaching blueprint for just one kind of health plan and one kind of health care choice. HMOs are an excellent choice for many Americans. Over 12 million Blue Cross and Blue Shield HMO members agree. But we don't think Congress should take away choice in health plans.

BlueCross BlueShield Association
An Association of Independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans

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the weekly
Standard

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The Audit Bureau Member

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Hillary's Pakistan Policy

President Clinton failed pathetically to persuade Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif not to test nuclear weapons, but then Hillary Rodham Clinton didn't fare any better in her foray into Pakistani politics.

A few weeks before India detonated five nuclear devices, the first lady met in the Map Room of the White House with Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister and now leader of the chief opposition party in Pakistan. This was unusual, both because opposition leaders aren't usually hosted at the White House and because the current leader, Sharif, hadn't been invited at all.

But Hillary had met earlier with Bhutto when she visited Pakistan, so there was a rationale for the meeting here. The two talked about politics and policy for 35 minutes, and it's clear now that Hillary didn't make much of an impression. Later, after India went nuclear, Bhutto sneeringly rejected the Clinton position that Pakistan shouldn't follow suit. On the contrary, she publicly taunted Sharif, insisting his manhood was at stake if he didn't explode some nukes. She even offered to send him jewelry to wear with a dress, should he continue to act like a scared woman. That wasn't exactly the Hillary line.

The Authentic Bush

Trolling for votes late in the 1988 presidential campaign, George Bush did what all moderate Republicans in search of conservative support seem to end up doing: He attacked Harvard. Michael Dukakis, Bush explained, possesses a "Harvard boutique" mindset steeped in "liberalism and elitism." "I don't want somebody from Harvard telling me what I can do and what I can't do," Bush told a crowd of non-Harvard graduates in Modesto, Calif., that year. "There's an elite inside the elite there."

Fast-forward a decade. Last week, the former president addressed those very elites, in a speech at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. How did it go? The folks in Modesto may have trouble believing this, but Bush fit right in. After showering the elite inside the elite—people "to whom I feel very, very close"—with paragraphs of enthusiastic praise, Bush gave his take on what is wrong with Washington. It's not that Bill Clinton is corrupt, or inept, or even that he seduced his intern, Bush explained. "I'm not here to assign blame," he said—at least not to the one man who deserves it. The problem with Washington, according to Bush, is the "innuendo," the "maelstrom of personal attacks and counter-charges"—indeed, the entire "political climate in our nation's capital." Where did such a climate come from? Well, said Bush, "some of this has to do with the intrusive nature of the national press," a group whose unscrupulous behavior has helped to "poison" the "well of public discourse."

Sound familiar? It should. It's an explanation popular with quite a few Harvard graduates, many of whom now work at the White House. And just when we were tempted to start feeling nostalgic for the Bush administration.

Lott's Smoke Signals

How will Trent Lott, the Senate majority leader, deal with John McCain's tobacco bill? Among Republicans, there's growing opposition to McCain's bill. But Lott's interest in passing something "anti-tobacco" trumps his concern over passing a bad bill. Thus it was Lott who, earlier this year, circumvented Don Nickles, the Senate Republican supposedly formulating GOP tobacco policy, and asked McCain to draw up a bill. When McCain brought his package before the commerce committee, Lott urged the committee's Republicans to support it (Lott himself is a member of the committee). All but one, John Ashcroft, complied. And a few weeks ago, when Ashcroft and Orrin Hatch were preventing the bill from sailing through the Senate, Lott needled them to end the stall: "If the Senate is smart, it will stop this dilatory stuff and get [the bill] done this week. Is the Senate smart? Not if it has an alternative."

But many Republicans who supported the bill are now having second thoughts, as they've come to understand the shortcomings in a measure that, according to one Senate GOP study, would result in roughly $800 billion in new taxes. Ashcroft, who has done yeoman's work in building opposition to the McCain bill, will pro-

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pose earmarking at least half the tobacco-tax hikes for tax cuts for people with annual incomes below $30,000. Is Lott going to support this? Or, faced with Democratic threats to tie up the legislative calendar with mischievous tobacco-related amendments, will he capitulate along the lines of last year's chemical-weapons-treaty debate and push for a quick resolution? His colleagues are desperate to find out.

Higher Education

Good news for the transgendered egghead community! The Harvard University Gay & Lesbian Caucus has announced that it will this week bestow the Caucus Visibility Award to Diana Eck and Dorothy Austin. Eck and Austin have become famous at Harvard for being co-masters of Harvard's Lowell House—serving as housemother and, um, housemother to the students there. As the press release put it, they are "the first same-sex couple to guide the unique academic community fostered within each of Harvard's dormitories," and now, as recipients of the Caucus Visibility Award, they can further encourage "the visibility of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered faculty and staff." Sometimes progress proceeds by leaps and bounds. At this rate, Harvard will be a sexual utopia before the decade is out.

The Witness as Flake

Veterans of the great Reagan-era debates over nuclear weaponry and the Star Wars missile defense are suddenly in demand again on Capitol Hill, what with all the hearings on the Chinese satellite-launch program and the India-Pakistan arms race. Sen. Thad Cochran's May 21 hearing on technology transfers to China almost had the flavor of a class reunion—there was Dr. William Graham, once an Air Force project officer on the Minuteman ICBM, later science adviser to Presidents Reagan and Bush, William Schneider, the one-time undersecretary of state for security assistance, and, yes, anti-nuke activist John Pike, whose testimony was requested by Michigan Democrat Carl Levin.

Pike noted his 15 years as director of space policy at the Federation of American Scientists, and he was admirably modest about his own credentials. With good reason, it turned out. Pike—whose Web site proudly and probably accurately proclaims that he "did more than any single individual to throw sand into the gears" of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative—told the senators that he "attended Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tenn., as an undergraduate."

The wording was crucial. Pike had previously told Senate staff that he earned a B.A. in "science policy" from Vanderbilt in 1974; Vanderbilt, on the other hand, said that Pike had attended the school at various times from 1971 to 1978, but had never received a degree (reminding The Scrapbook of Bluto Blutarsky's lament in *Animal House* when Dean Wormer finally expelled the Delts: "Seven years down the drain"). Pike pulled a Clinton when he learned that Vanderbilt had blown the whistle on his résumé, saying he had run out of money after earning most of the credits he needed and had claimed a degree because "that's what my momma told me to say."

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Correspondence

The Fate of the Jews

Charles Krauthammer's article "At Last, Zion" (May 11) is one of the most important I have come across. Krauthammer has given me an enormous amount of food for thought and makes our present course of policy even more disturbing to me.

HENRY A. KISSINGER
NEW YORK, NY

A Plagiarist's Plagiarist

In reference to "Jonathan Broder's Plagiarism of the Week" (SCRAPBOOK, May 18):

Broder was sent to Syria by *The Jerusalem Report*. Since we are an Israeli publication, we thought it prudent, to protect Broder, to allow him to use a pseudonym. During his visit he met extensively with embassy officials who provided him with the information Pipes claims Broder plagiarized.

Since Pipes is an academic and gleans his facts from what we publish, you seem to have put the cart before the horse. Unlike those who sit in an ivory tower and pontificate about the world, Broder traveled thousands of miles and put himself at considerable personal risk to bring first-hand information to our readers.

On a personal level, I am aghast at the vindictiveness and blatant dishonesty of your report.

HIRSH GOODMAN
THE JERUSALEM REPORT
JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

DANIEL PIPES RESPONDS: ***Why is Hirsh Goodman attacking me? His own reporter, Jonathan Broder, acknowledged in our telephone conversation that he drew from my book to an improper extent without attribution.***

Goodman implies that journalists are better people than analysts. Perhaps so, but we who "sit in an ivory tower and pontificate" do also sometimes travel to such scary places as Syria, Iraq, and Iran. And yes, we also meet with embassy officials. Some of us even speak the local languages and go outside of the embassies! But we rarely inflate our importance by claiming that to do so puts us at "considerable personal risk."

Another point: Yes, I learn a great deal from fine news publications like **The Jerusalem Report.** ***In turn,*** **The Jerusalem Report** ***leans heavily on analysts like myself to make sense of the mass of facts it accumulates. It's a useful, even symbiotic relationship. Why the nastiness?***

But this is not the issue at hand. Goodman's changing the subject does not get Jonathan Broder off the hook for plagiarism.

Songs of the Old

My heartfelt thanks to Bob McManus. He has put into words what I have not been able to articulate ("We Must Remember This," May 25). McManus has put a foundation under my feelings.

I, for one, refuse to visit The Wall. It was designed by people I do not understand, and who do not understand me. It is fundamentally wrong. A visit would trigger a storm of rage I could not handle.

McManus is correct to claim that The Wall is the final victory of the antiwar movement. I cannot and will not accede to their view of the war, even in as small a way as visiting The Wall. I will mourn the fallen alone, with the dignity they deserve. It was not wrong for us to try to save the people of Vietnam from the Hanoi regime, and we were not mistaken to think that is what we were doing.

President Johnson was wrong to get us into the war by misleading the American people about the events in the Tonkin Gulf; and he was wrong in the way he fought the war. But this dishonors him, not us who fought. If the American people are dishonored by this war, it is because of the way we ended it—not because we fought it. I wept bitter tears when we abandoned the people of Vietnam, and I am still not able to think about this calmly. I doubt I ever will.

McManus is wrong about one thing, however. We veterans do not stand alone. When I met the veterans of Desert Storm, to a man they understood, respected, and honored what we did in Vietnam. We saluted each other. I am happy that McManus, and at least a few others outside the brotherhood, understand the emotions The Wall raises in old soldiers. I can only hope that history will understand as well.

P.J. GARRISON
EL PASO, TX

Retired, But Still a Mess

Noemie Emery's review of ex-Representative Pat Schroeder's *24 Years of Housework . . . and the Place Is Still a Mess* was devastating ("Malice in Wonderland," May 25).

I have always resented the fact that certain activists have claimed ownership of feminism to such a degree that many women who espouse feminist principles are wary of calling themselves feminists. To say, as Emery does, that Schroeder's book "helps explain why feminism, as Schroeder's kind defined it, has come apart at the seams" makes me think that Emery agrees with this.

Women won't have equal rights if we don't accept equal responsibility for our ideas and actions. Part of that responsibility includes subjecting our ideas to the kind of critical review so brilliantly practiced by Emery.

ABBY NEWBOLD VIGNERON
CAMBRIDGE, MA

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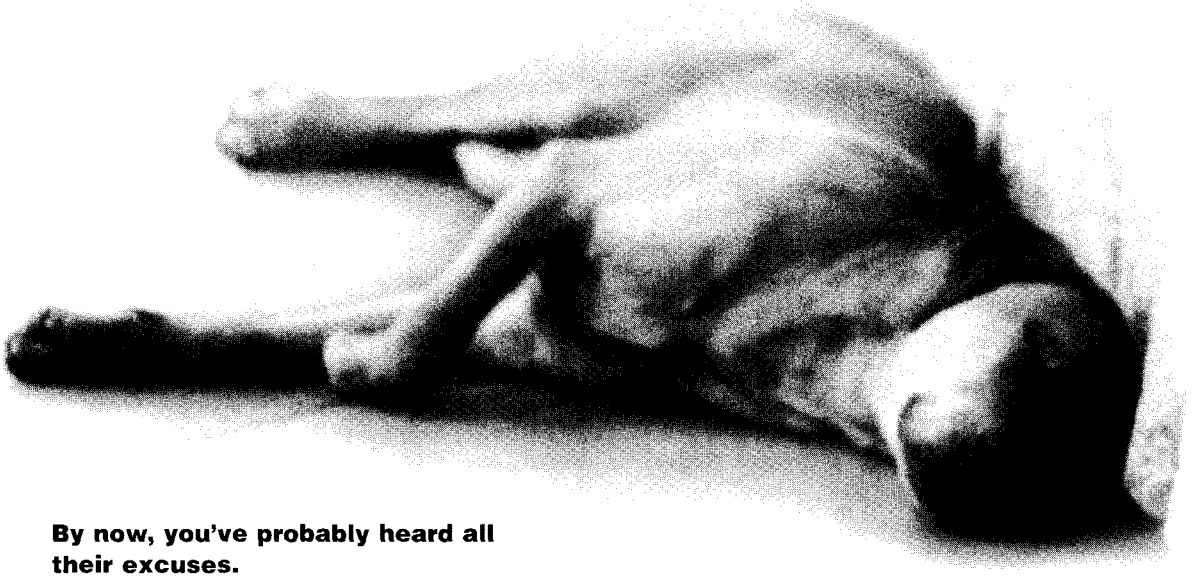
How Long Will These Sleeping Dogs Lie?



By now, you've probably heard all their excuses.

The Big Dogs, AT&T and MCI, are still howling that they can't compete in local telephone markets. It's just too difficult. It requires too much effort.

Just because they don't want to compete, doesn't mean there isn't competition.

Recently, the Federal Communications Commission held hearings in which smaller, local competitors described their success in competing against the Bell companies.

These smaller companies don't have the tens of thousands of employees that the big long distance giants do. They don't have billions of investment dollars. But they are competing.

While the big dogs are sleeping, Regional Bells are working to make competition work.

How? Local phone companies have devoted more than $4 billion and assigned over 8,000 employees to make sure competition works. They've built customized network elements; offered on-site network training and customer service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All to connect MCI, AT&T and other competitors to local markets.

You know those big dogs. They lie around all day.

MCI and AT&T have given up on local residential service. Why? The markets are open. Smaller companies are competing. Competition is here.

MCI and AT&T are stalling competition. They only want competition on their own terms. On their own timetable. That's what their executives conceded during recent merger discussions.

Wake up big dogs. And stop all that lying around.

We'll connect all Americans if we're allowed to compete.

UNITED STATES TELEPHONE ASSOCIATION

America's Local Phone Companies • www.callthemonit.com

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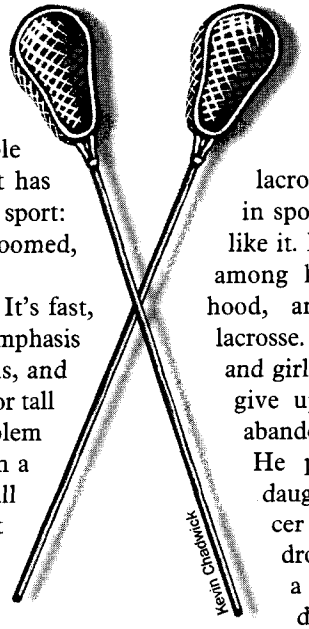
Casual

The Grand New Game

I have seen the future of American sports, and its name is lacrosse. Football, baseball, basketball, and soccer will, sooner or later, be forced to step aside. They all have their fatal flaws anyway. Football stresses physical size, which is fine for Reggie White but not for the rest of us. Baseball, unless you're the pitcher or the catcher, consists mostly of standing around. For basketball, you'd better be very tall. Soccer has none of these drawbacks—it's for average-sized people who like to run—but it has the dumbest rule of any sport: no hands. Thus, it's doomed, too.



That leaves lacrosse. It's fast, it's rough, it puts great emphasis on skill with your hands, and you don't have to be big or tall to be a star. Its only problem is the field is large, often a football field, and the ball is small. This makes it hard for spectators to see when goals are scored.

Of course, if you live west of the Appalachians and south of Virginia, you've probably never had a chance to see a lacrosse game in the first place. Trust me, lacrosse is coming to your town. It's growing the way soccer did in the 1980s, partly because soccer is fading in popularity. Lacrosse has something else besides the use of hands that soccer doesn't—lots of scoring. The average soccer score is 0-0. In lacrosse, it's 12-10.

Not that I've ever played lacrosse competitively (or non-competitively, for that matter). In fact, until my daughter Grace and son Freddy started playing the sport a half-dozen years ago, I'd seen only one game, and that was in college (I left the game early). Ah, but now I've seen dozens of games, and though I haven't figured out all of the rules, especially in girls' lacrosse, I consider myself a reasonably knowledgeable fan. In time, I'll become an expert. I actually practice with my kids, tossing the ball around in the backyard. They use lacrosse sticks. I use my baseball glove.

How, you ask, can I be so sure that lacrosse is the hottest trend in sports? Number one, kids like it. I've conducted a survey among kids in my neighborhood, and, yes, they prefer lacrosse. I'm talking about boys and girls. My son isn't ready to give up basketball, but he's abandoned soccer for lacrosse. He plays year-round. My daughter suffered from soccer burnout and also dropped out. Now, she has a special scoring play designed for her called "Surge Barnes" on her school team—and she's a defensive player, not an attacker. Her boyfriend now limits his sports activity to basketball in season and lacrosse all year. And so on.

Number two, boys like to hit each other with sticks. It's in the genes. And lacrosse gives them the opportunity to whack away at their opponents, so long as they don't hit them on the head, face, or back. They're allowed to jab with their sticks as well. Naturally, this leads to some unintended consequences. Young boys often carry their lacrosse sticks around the house and poke and swat their parents and siblings. My attitude is, if this is the worst thing that happens, I can live with it.

Number three, Title IX—you know, that federal regulation that's killing off so many boys' sports because schools are required to equalize their athletic programs between girls' and boys' teams. One way to help comply with Title IX is to add girls' lacrosse, and many, many schools are doing just that. Bad reason, good result. Again, I can live with it.

Girls' lacrosse has its anomalies. Girls play the game differently from boys: no helmets or shoulder and arm pads, no whacking with the stick, 12 players on a side to 10 for males. The strangest rule involves "shooting space," which bars a defender from getting between her opponent and the goal. The idea is to avoid being hit by the ball, which is hard and smaller than a baseball. This antique of a rule is bound to be repealed. Girls don't need it anymore. They're tough. The best girls' teams play with the mercilessness of boys.

At least the girls' team I see the most does. That's the squad at St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School in Alexandria, Va., coached by my next-door neighbor, Kathy Jenkins. Her players are as well conditioned as Scottie Pippen, as aggressive as Karl Malone. That's why they're perennially top-ranked in the nation and Kathy is regarded as the best coach of girls' high-school lacrosse in America.

Kathy is a lacrosse professional. One of her fellow coaches, Craig Shirley, is a lacrosse zealot. He coaches the boys' j.v. team. He's moonlighting actually, since, full-time, he's a Washington publicist. Craig is crusading for lacrosse to become an Olympic sport. It soon will, I'm sure. The only question in my mind is how it supplants NFL football on Sunday-afternoon TV.

Fred Barnes

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the weekly Standard

THE PRIVILEGE PRESIDENCY

Two weeks ago, chief judge Norma Holloway Johnson of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia released a large collection of documents—and her final ruling—concerning the Clinton administration's refusal to allow testimony by Secret Service officials before Kenneth Starr's Lewinsky-scandal grand jury. Last week, Johnson's court released a comparable set of documents related to still-earlier litigation over testimony by White House aides Bruce Lindsey and Sidney Blumenthal. The bottom line of these cases has now been widely reported: The administration was rebuffed in each instance, and Judge Johnson ordered all the disputed witnesses to provide their evidence forthwith.

Which result, truth be told, is not particularly interesting. The administration has long claimed that various, constitutionally vital "privileges" bar certain Lewinsky-relevant testimony by federal employees. That claim has always been preposterous on its face. So it was almost a foregone conclusion that Judge Johnson, if she were correctly to apply the law, would reject it.

There is, nevertheless, one major surprise contained in the record of this litigation, a surprise that no one yet seems to have noticed. The surprise is just how tangled and precarious Bill Clinton's legal and political situation has become. Examined in detail, and reduced to its unintended essence, the administration's argument is now this: The president's top aides and Secret Service agents must be excused from the Lewinsky grand jury proceedings—*precisely because he is probably guilty*. In motions before Judge Johnson's court, the White House and Justice Department have all but explicitly acknowledged that Clinton *did* likely have sex with the intern, *did* likely then perjure himself about it, and *has* likely then, ever since, been located at the epicenter of a major obstruction of justice.

In late February, responding to subpoenas, Bruce Lindsey and Sidney Blumenthal appeared before the grand jury. Each flatly refused to answer substantive questions about Lewinsky-scandal conversations they'd had in the White House. Both asserted the "executive privilege" protections enjoyed by senior government officials when they are advising the president about his public duties. Lindsey, for his part, also invoked an absolute "attorney-client privilege" on behalf of the White House as an institution.

Again, these claims were little more than a frivolous delaying tactic, as the Office of the Independent Counsel asked Judge Johnson to acknowledge a few weeks later. Federal crimes committed to conceal adulterous fellatio are not a presidential responsibility enumerated in Article II of the Constitution, and so knowledge of such stuff cannot be withheld from government investigators on the basis of executive privilege. Nor can a federal employee advance attorney-client privilege against a federal grand-jury probe. Bruce Lindsey works for the government. The government cannot have an interest in denying itself material evidence about crimes it is attempting to prosecute. And there is not a speck of legal precedent that suggests otherwise.

But the White House, supporting the Lindsey/Blumenthal privilege assertions in Judge Johnson's court, was at great pains to deny this clear reality. The privileges apply, according to the White House, because Monica Lewinsky is not just this particular president's private peccadillo, but a subject of "profound impact" on the long-term "functioning of the presidency" as a whole.

When Bruce Lindsey and Sidney Blumenthal are discussing the young lady with their colleagues—and with Clinton—they are never, *never* scheming merely to keep the president out of jail. They are always, *always* considering how to prevent the Lewinsky scandal "from hampering the president's conduct of the nation's military and foreign policy" with respect to Iraq. Or addressing suchlike grave and portentous matters. These conversations take place "virtually every day," we are asked to believe. And if participants in this ongoing constitutional seminar must give testimony about their super-important deliberations, the

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very future of the Republic will be imperiled.

How is it, then, that the White House has happily delivered so many other of its senior officials to the Lewinsky grand jury? They brag about it, even. White House counsel Charles F.C. Ruff, in a sworn declaration dated March 17, reminded Judge Johnson that innumerable West Wing staffers had either been "subpoenaed to testify" or "asked to submit voluntarily to an interview." And "all of these individuals have cooperated" and "none has asserted privilege over any information that they possess." Is it possible that only Bruce Lindsey and Sidney Blumenthal advise Bill Clinton about the effect of Monica Lewinsky on his constitutional obligations—and that this is all these two famously low-road individuals ever think about? Is there some other circumstance or principle that might distinguish this "privileged" duo from every last one of their West Wing co-workers?

Peter Steiner

No. The White House's own courtroom reasoning allows only two conclusions: Either dozens of Clinton aides are covered by privilege, or none of them is. And the actual practice of the White House, its selective application of privilege in just these two instances, can mean only one thing: Bruce Lindsey and Sidney Blumenthal must know something especially damaging about Bill Clinton.

In the Secret Service litigation, the administration's legal claims were still more fatuous, and its logic still more obviously incriminating of the president. On March 13, the Office of the Independent Counsel attempted to depose two Secret Service agents believed to have observed evidence relevant to the Lewinsky inquiry. They declined to cooperate, asserting an unqualified "protective-function privilege" and arguing that, were they forced to testify, President Clinton—and future presidents—would hold the Service at bay and therefore run a significantly increased risk of assassination. On March 23, Starr's deputies attempted to depose the attorney for these two Secret Service agents. He, too, invoked the protective-function privilege. Starr then served subpoenas on all three men, which they resisted.

There's a rather basic problem of law here, which Judge Johnson has now made quick work of in her ruling. There has never before in American history, recognized in any American court or statute, been any such thing as "protective-function privilege"; it is an ad hoc, Lewinsky-inspired invention of the Secret Service and its Justice Department attorneys. Nor *can* there be a protective-function privilege. Constitutional precedent and federal rules of evidence uniformly prohibit judges from recognizing testimonial privileges that defy congressionally enacted legislation. And Congress decades ago passed a law obliging all federal employees promptly to report evidence of any crime to the appropriate authorities. Federal law-enforcement officers cannot invoke some brand-new privilege to exempt themselves from testimony before a federal grand-jury investigation.

Again, though, this part is a total no-brainer. What is truly amazing about the administration's assertion of the so-called protective-function privilege is what it implies about Bill Clinton's loudly proclaimed innocence in the Lewinsky affair. If evidence in the possession of Secret Service agents were apt to exonerate him, then the president could only welcome it, and there would be no conceivable reason for him later to push those agents away and place himself at the mercy of an assassin. The president would withdraw from his bodyguards—and the invocation of "protective-function privilege" could be necessary—only if he had done something very wrong and the Secret Service were aware of it. It is an odd kind of legal privilege, this: one whose only logical purpose can be to protect those presidents who have probably committed serious crimes.

As, of course, this president has.

—David Tell, for the Editors

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Worse than Iran-contra

by David Frum

Scientists tell us that a human embryo recapitulates in only nine months the entire evolution of life, from single-celled molecule to Homo sapiens. Something similar seems to be going on over at the Clinton White House: It appears bent on cramming a reenactment of every presidential scandal in modern American history into just two terms. In short order, we have seen JFK's sexual adventuring, Lyndon Johnson's mysterious business maneuvers, and Watergate stonewalling. Now, with its China dealings, the Clinton White House is mimicking Iran-contra. And this time, it has completely outdone the original.

The Iran-contra scandal exploded in November 1986. At the beginning of that month, a Lebanese newspaper reported that Ronald Reagan's national security adviser, Bud McFarlane, had visited Tehran in an attempt to obtain the release of American hostages in Lebanon. The Reagan administration briefly struggled to contain the story but soon was obliged to admit that it had been shipping arms to the Iranian side of the Iran-Iraq war. A few days later, President Reagan and attorney general Ed Meese called a televised news conference to make an amazing confession: Profits from the Iranian arms sales had been diverted to the contras, in violation of a law passed by Congress barring aid to the anti-Communist Nicaraguan resistance. The administration promptly ordered an internal probe to determine how the diversion had happened, vowed full cooperation with Congress, and waived all claims of executive and attorney-client privilege.

Iran-contra was immediately and almost unanimously assessed as the most serious political scandal since Watergate. There was no handwringing then about invasions of privacy or the power of the independent counsel's office. The mood of the day was instead an eager *Go get 'em!* And in fact an important principle was at stake. By circumventing the congressional ban on aid to the contras, the architects of Iran-contra were circumventing Article I of the Constitution, which vests all control over public moneys in Congress. But with the news of Johnny Chung's confession to the Justice Department that at least $80,000 of the soft money he delivered to the 1996 Clinton campaign had been donated by the daughter of a Chinese general, we can begin to see Iran-contra in a strange new light.

The essence of the Iran-contra scandal was the charge that the Reagan administration had sold weapons to an unfriendly regime to raise money for illegal purposes. It now looks disturbingly plausible that the Clinton administration has over the past six years been engaged in something very similar: authorizing the sale of advanced military technology to China in exchange for dubious domestic and illegal foreign campaign contributions. The Reaganites, though, could at least offer this defense: However misguided, or even foolish their project was, it did not put the national security of the United States at risk.

Barring a U.S. tank invasion of Iran, the weapons the Reagan administration shipped to the ayatollah—some 1,504 antitank missiles plus 18 anti-aircraft missiles that the dissatisfied Iranians returned—were never likely to be used against Americans. Better still, once used (and the Iranians were waging a desperate war against Saddam Hussein at the time), the missiles would be gone for good. Iran after Iran-contra was not one iota stronger than it had been before. The Clinton administration, on the other hand, in the spirit of "give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach him to fish and he eats for a lifetime," has been selling the Chinese the technology for making weapons—supercomputers to simulate nuclear tests, satellite technology that might help aim ballistic missiles more accurately—that could easily be used against the United States and its allies.

And there was something else the authors of Iran-contra could say for themselves: Even if they erred, even if they broke laws, nobody ever accused them of being motivated by anything other than their understanding of the national interest. Some Iranian middlemen made money out of Iran-contra, and former general Richard Secord was paid a fee for his part in the transaction. But with the sole exception of Oliver North—who took $16,000 from one of the middlemen to pay for a security fence around his house—none of the Reagan administration officials derived or expected to derive any personal benefit from the sale of arms to Iran, from the aid to the contras, or from the cash link between the two.

President Clinton of course makes similar claims for himself. He says he considered nothing except what was good for America when he authorized the Loral satellite launches—and, by implication, all the other technology deals with China that have been done since 1993. His words would be easier to believe if he had not been caught in so many previous lies—and if his campaign treasury had not been stuffed with cash from the Chinese government, American aerospace companies, Charlie Trie's many mysterious friends, Al Gore's Buddhist nuns, and the Riady family. It's always possible, of course, that the money did not in the end influence him. But judging by outward

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appearances, this is an administration for sale on a scale that would have impressed Edward Gibbon.

Republican talking heads have been repeating with robotic unanimity the slogan that the Loral satellite deal is a national-security scandal, not a financial scandal. That is less than half right. It's true that the sale to a potentially hostile power of advanced technology with nuclear-warfare applications over the objections of the State, Defense, and Justice departments and the CIA *is* eyebrow-raising. But it's the conjunction of this sale with massive and often illegal fund-raising from people with large interests in placating the Chinese government that transforms the Loral deal from routine Clinton foreign-policy boneheadedness into something far more disquieting.

Open trade with China is not a self-evidently idiotic policy, and sometimes it is hard to know precisely where commercial considerations must stop and security concerns take priority. Those are the determinations that Americans should be able to trust their president to make. And that is why it is so urgent that the president preserve his reputation for integrity and honor beyond question or reproach. If not for the foreign contributions, the satellite sale would be a controversy, not a scandal, because nobody could call it anything worse than an error in judgment. It's the money that taints the deal. We cannot know what is inside the president's mind. The campaign contributions from China and its friends may not really have been a quid; the presidential satellite waivers may not ultimately have been a quo. Who knows? We can only see what is visible—and that is a dizzying flow of Chinese money into the Clinton campaign and an equally dizzying flow of potentially deadly technology out of America.

The Clinton administration appears remarkably unflustered by all this. There have been no promises to get to the bottom of the story, nothing like the Tower Commission that Ronald Reagan instantly convened in 1986. Back when the story broke of the purloined FBI files, the Clinton administration's spin-doctors smilingly argued that the administration might be a bit sloppy, but it was not crooked. They have stopped saying things like that. Perhaps a weary administration has decided it can no longer be bothered to keep up the appearance of honesty. Perhaps it has taken the Lewinsky affair as proof that Reagan was a chump: that a president does *not* have to answer questions if the answers are embarrassing.

So the press and Congress must decide for themselves how to react to the possibility that the flow of money in and weapons technology out was more than a coincidence. How big a scandal is this one really?

Just for comparison, imagine that Ronald Reagan had sold the Iranians not anti-tank weapons, but ballistic-missile technology. Imagine that he had accepted millions of dollars in campaign donations from the ayatollah's government, from private Iranian citizens with tight business ties to that government, and from U.S. oil companies eager to drill in Iran. How big a scandal would *that* have been?

Or imagine this: Suppose that Ronald Reagan had drawn large, murky benefits throughout his governorship from a pro-apartheid South African billionaire? Suppose that money from that same billionaire had been paid to an intimate Reagan associate at a time when he was supposed to testify about Reagan's involvement in a financial crime? What if Reagan had called for a tough policy against South Africa during the campaign of 1980 only to reverse himself as soon as he entered office—and had then invited the local representative of that helpful billionaire into his Commerce Department, recruited him as a fund-raiser for his reelection campaign, and accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars of illegal contributions from South Africans?

But I am asking you to imagine the unimaginable. The mind cannot encompass it. The scandal that would have been uncorked by such revelations about the Reagan administration, like Godzilla, would have been too colossal to fit onto even the largest screen. And for good reason. Since the first days of the Republic, Americans have looked upon the threat of foreign bribery with horror. This menace preoccupied the authors of the *Federalist Papers*, who returned to it again and again. "[C]abal, intrigue and corruption [are the] most deadly adversaries of republican government," they wrote. These evils "might naturally have been expected to make their approaches from more than one quarter, but chiefly from the desire in foreign powers to gain an improper ascendant in our councils." It was a whiff of this sort of corruption that energized Lawrence Walsh's inquiry into Iran-contra. He found no evidence of this type of wrongdoing, and in his strange and bitter final report could muster only sly insinuations against the targets of his investigation.

The threat of foreign corruption was an illusion in 1986. Is it real in 1998? It is imperative that we learn the truth. In the end, the security of the American people is safeguarded by the judgment and integrity of the man they choose as president. To quote the *Federalist Papers* again: "[A] man raised from the station of a private citizen to the rank of chief magistrate, possessed of but a moderate or slender fortune, and looking forward to a period not very remote, when he may probably be obliged to return to the station from which he was taken, might sometimes be under temptations to sacrifice his duty to his interest. . . . An avaricious man might be tempted to betray the interests of the state to the acquisition of wealth. An ambitious man might make his own aggrandizement, by

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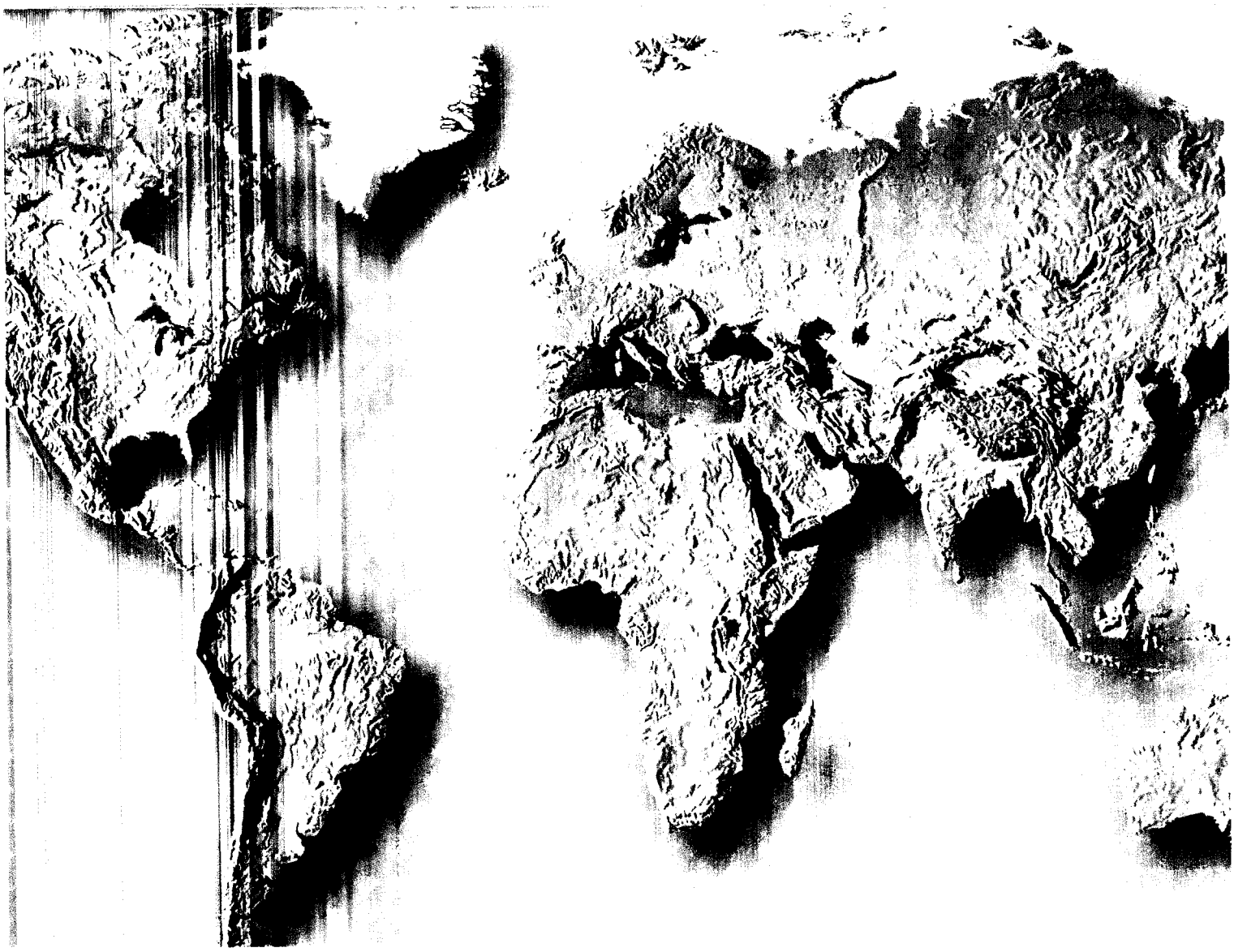

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the aid of a foreign power, the price of treachery to his constituents."

Nobody doubts that Bill Clinton is an ambitious man. The deeply, deeply disquieting question raised by his latest scandal is: exactly *how* ambitious? What price has he paid? And at what cost to the American people?

David Frum is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

PRESIDENT ALBATROSS

by Jay Nordlinger

THE WEEK OF MAY 18 was not an especially good one for Bill Clinton. New China allegations had surfaced, and Republicans were quick to make hay. The House leadership scheduled a series of votes, each intended to rebuke Clinton for his China policy. Democrats had little choice but to go along. Many of them argued that China was a far graver matter than presidential lubricity.

Then, in the middle of the week, Republican leaders scheduled two more votes, this time on resolutions relating to Clinton's obstructionism. These latter votes were little noticed by the media, but they nonetheless revealed a disquiet in Democratic ranks. One of the resolutions called on the president to demand that his friends, appointees, and associates "come forward and testify fully and truthfully" before congressional committees (including that chaired by the controversial Dan Burton). An astounding 69 Democrats out of 206 supported this measure, with another 12 voting "present." Their votes—inconceivable before the China quake hit—stung a president whom almost every Democrat had long sought to protect.

CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS ARE CAREFUL NOT TO CRITICIZE CLINTON TOO BLATANTLY, BUT THEIR NERVOUSNESS OCCASIONALLY CREEPS OUT.

The other resolution, however, was even more significant. Replete with references to Richard Nixon and Watergate, it urged Clinton to make available any and all documents pertaining to his claim of executive privilege—a claim that the president has yet to acknowledge in public. The measure was nonbinding, but, even so, remarkable: It essentially accused Clinton of dealing in bad faith. And 36 Democrats supported it, with 6 voting "present." Republican whip Tom DeLay was exultant. "This represents the first crack in the Democratic stonewall strategy," he said. And although that crack is a relatively small one, it could lead to disintegration.

So, who are the Democrats responsible for the cracking? On the executive-privilege vote, they are a mixture. A few of them are retiring at the end of the present term, free of party constraints. A few others are genuine conservatives, often unfriendly to the administration. But most of the 36 are Clinton Democrats from tough districts who face close races against well-funded opponents—and they are wary of a president who may prove an albatross around their necks.

Ted Strickland, for example, represents southeastern Ohio, a classic swing district. In 1992, he was elected with 51 percent of the vote. Two years later, he lost in the Republican tidal wave—and again the vote was 51 percent to 49 percent. In 1996, he recaptured the seat—once more with only 51 percent. And next fall, he faces Ohio's lieutenant governor, Nancy Hollister, a moderate, pro-choice Republican who is bound to run a strong campaign.

Strickland says that he voted against Clinton on executive privilege "because I believe in full disclosure. I believe in openness, and I think the public has a right to know." He says that he "consistently" tells his constituents that "wrongdoing should be identified and punished, and that no one is above the law—not the president, and not Kenneth Starr." Strickland further contends, like so many of his fellow Democrats, that "the recent accusations"—meaning those concerning China—"are by far the most serious for the well-being of the country." Still, he adds, he would welcome Clinton to his district and is not attempting to distance himself from the president.

The GOP, for its part, is targeting Strickland's seat, and several others as well. Neil Abercrombie of Hawaii—a liberal mainstay yet one of the Democratic 36—is considered vulnerable, with one Republican poll showing him behind. Leonard Boswell of Iowa won by 49 percent to 48 percent last time, a margin of only a few thousand votes. Charlie Stenholm in Texas

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is fighting a second pitched battle with his 1996 challenger, Rudy Izzard. And Republicans are fairly licking their chops over Jim Maloney in Connecticut, who, as the GOP sees it, is all but toast.

These Democrats are careful not to criticize the president too blatantly—always cluck-clucking over Starr and his long and costly investigation—but their nervousness occasionally creeps out. Scotty Baesler of Kentucky, for instance, won his party's nomination for Senate last week. Asked about his vote in favor of the executive-privilege resolution, he called Clinton's invocation of the privilege "a hard thing to explain back home" and said that presidential aides ought to testify when subpoenaed. Gary Condit of California allowed that he and other Democrats voted with Republicans "out of a sense of frustration and a desire to get to the bottom of [the scandals], and soon." Marion Berry of Arkansas—not to be confused with Washington's Mayor Barry—is a longtime backer of Clinton's and faces no opposition in November. Yet even he supported the resolution, explaining, "I voted for it because I don't see any problem with the information coming out."

Thirty-six votes on executive privilege—and 69 on its companion resolution—do not a party-wide abandonment make. But Democrats are clearly starting to flinch at Clinton's embrace. On May 19, the House voted on a measure expressing "the sense of the Congress" that the Burton committee should grant immunity to witnesses with stories to tell about illegal fund-raising. For weeks, the Democrats on that committee had blocked such immunity. But each of those Democrats—including the exasperating Henry Waxman—supported the GOP's immunity resolution, evidently shaken by the fresh China charges. Five days earlier, all but three House Democrats had voted for a measure disapproving of Burton's handling of his committee.

What's more, Jim Davis, a Democrat from the Tampa region of Florida, has declared that he will not welcome the president's support, because "I think the character issue does matter here. I am not in the camp of 'I believe the president.' I am in the camp of 'Let's have a thorough investigation and learn the facts.'" And in New Hampshire, a Democratic challenger, Mary Rauh, has called for the appointment of another independent counsel—this one to probe the Clinton-China connection.

Republicans, meanwhile, expect to schedule more votes that force their Democratic colleagues to take a stand on Clinton and scandal. And Democrats, singed over and over by the president, never know when they will be burned again. As one political insider puts it, they "keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. And some of them are starting to see that they had better be cautious about what they do." Democratic strategist Peter Hart confided to the *Baltimore Sun* that "Democrats don't want to tie themselves to the Clinton mast, because they don't know what's ahead." And Sen. Bob Kerrey of Nebraska, in a particularly bracing statement, told *Roll Call*, "I love my country a lot more than I love the [Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee]," which he heads.

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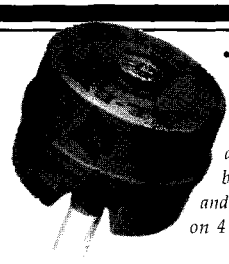

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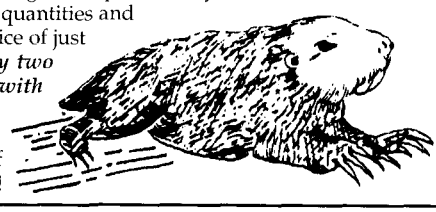

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The polls, for now, show Clinton holding steady, and most Democrats are remaining calm. But when enough of them slink toward the life boats, leaving behind a bucking ship, we will know that this presidency's endgame is in progress. Clinton may be their brother, but he is heavy, and Democrats would rather not go down with him.

Jay Nordlinger is associate editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

SOUTH OF THE BORDER

by Lorne Gunter

TO THE EYE, LITTLE CHANGES when you drive south over the border from Alberta into Montana. There are billboards advertising cigarettes, an enticement Canada's rulers have judged their subjects too gullible to view. And paved shoulders are rare. Montanans have chosen to pay for asphalt only on that part of the road they actually drive on. Otherwise, undulating grassland is undulating grassland.

Still, some things are different. A Canadian senses it in his bones. There's Montana's "Basic Rule," for one. During daylight hours there is no posted speed limit on the state's major highways. Drivers are asked to be "reasonable and prudent," a speed the state highway patrol pegs at around 90 m.p.h. when the road surface is bare and dry.

And long before governments in the rest of North America (Nevada excepted) twigged onto gambling to supplement their revenues, Montana had legal poker clubs. Pay a token two-dollar fee for a one-night membership, and bet and bluff in peace. Beer and wine are available in grocery stores, and there is no statewide closing time for bars, both of which facts seem exotic to a Canuck. Nor is liquor taxed to discourage consumption, as it is north of the 49th parallel.

Then there's guns. Most Februarys, Snappy Sports Senter in Kallispell holds a used Magnum sale. They advertise it on the big illuminated sign out front. Possession of such a high-powered handgun in Canada is punishable by up to 10 years in jail (no, really). Montana is also a right-to-carry state. Any adult without a criminal record or a graduation certificate from a lunatic asylum must be issued a concealed-weapons permit if he requests one. However, if he is prepared to wear his pistol where all can see, no permit is required.

Finally, Montana is—for the time being, at least—an open-container state. Having an open bottle of beer in the cab of a pickup violates no state law. Nor does drinking from that bottle while driving 90 and fondling the Smith & Wesson tucked in one's boot. (Sipping Chablis in the back of a Volvo would be legal, too. But this is Montana, and such behavior is not an issue.) The offense is driving while drunk, not drinking while driving. Indeed, being able to uncap a Bud wherever one chooses is an important symbol of freedom. And it is a bracing reminder—even to a teetotaling non-hunter from north of the border—of what it means for a legislature to take self-government seriously, and trust its citizens to act as responsible adults.

But the pop-top, aluminum emblem of liberty is in jeopardy of being banned from the cabs of Big Sky pickups. The transportation bill that cleared Congress just before Memorial Day takes aim at the handful of recalcitrant states like Montana that don't outlaw open containers. A chunk of federal highway-construction funds is to be redirected to "safety programs" in those states that fail to prohibit open container. Never mind that highway repairs and improvements might well save more lives than banning open containers. The point is to force states like Montana to change laws that respect local culture and levels of self-reliance to satisfy the harridans of far-off safety lobbies and their cause-of-the-moment friends in Washington.

Gov. Marc Racicot is fond of saying, "Montana is what America used to be. Being a neighbor means more than living next door." It means looking out for one another without being told, including choosing not to abuse freedoms that might endanger others. Since the lifting of speed limits in 1995, following 21 years of federally imposed maximums, average speeds have increased by less than three miles per hour and fatalities have continued their 25-year decline. Despite its gun laws (or perhaps because of them), Montana has murder and crime rates well below the national average. And the rate of alcohol-related traffic deaths is nearly the same as the national average (43 percent versus 42 percent).

The Republican Congress that lifted the federal speed limits in 1995 and allowed the states to write their own laws understood the difference between Alberta and Montana, between paternalistic Canada and the freedom-loving U.S.A. Judging by this year's highway bill, that understanding has begun to fade. I point this out as a concerned neighbor.

Lorne Gunter is a columnist for the **Edmonton Journal.**

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Good School, Bad Quotas

by Pia Nordlinger

Few public schools inspire so much confidence as Arlington Traditional School. Parents praise this back-to-basics alternative school in Arlington, Va., for its early emphasis on reading and writing, its dress and behavior codes, and its expectation of parental involvement. Year after year, applicants far outnumber available spaces—a fact that has vaulted ATS onto the racial-preferences battleground.

The Arlington County School Board has twice been found in violation of civil-rights laws. In 1997 and 1998, the board admitted students to the county's two most popular alternative schools, including ATS, under lottery systems weighted in favor of minorities. Both years, the lotteries prompted discrimination suits on behalf of children denied admission. Each time, U.S. district judge Albert V. Bryan Jr. ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, holding that the board's use of race as a primary factor in admissions violated students' constitutional rights.

Arlington Traditional School was founded in 1978, when parents rebelled against the open classrooms and multi-age groupings in their neighborhood schools. ATS pleased parents by offering private-school quality at public-school prices—and administrators were glad to retain children who might otherwise have left the public system.

But the school board was never satisfied with the racial breakdown at ATS. "The attendance zone for the alternative schools is the whole county," explains spokeswoman Lisa Farbstein. "So, the board feels it is imperative that the students who attend the school are reflective of the countywide demographic population." Arlington's student population is 41 percent white, 31 percent Hispanic, 17 percent black, and 10 percent Asian. But in the 1996-97 school year, ATS's student body was 56 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic, 13 percent black, and 18 percent Asian.

To attract more minority families, the board asked ATS to step up its outreach. School officials advertised in minority newspapers and on minority radio stations. Informational events were held in Hispanic neighborhoods and conducted in Spanish. Nearly all materials for ATS parents are written in both English and Spanish.

While this effort increased applications from minorities, the numbers still failed to mirror those of the county. So the board devised a way to grant admission to alternative schools on the basis of race. For the 1997-98 school year, ATS received 145 applications for 46 kindergarten spaces to be filled by lottery. (Siblings of children already at the school are admitted automatically.) Under an ordinary lottery, the children with numbers 1 through 46 would have won. Instead, starting with number 32, school officials skipped over whites in favor of minority applicants, until a class of

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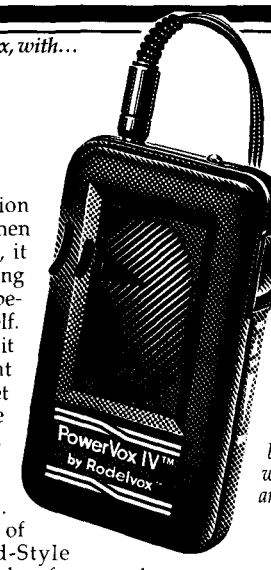

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the desired racial composition had been assembled. Among the white children passed over was Lara Tito, whose parents sued the school board for discrimination.

Lara Tito's court victory was resounding. Judge Bryan ordered the school board to cease using racial preferences in admissions. "Although the advantages of composing a student body whose racial makeup mirrors that of the community at large may be real," wrote Bryan in his May 13, 1997, opinion, "more is needed than the facile talisman of 'diversity' to justify infringing the constitutional right not to be discriminated against on the basis of race."

In response to this ruling, the school board altered its policy, but not quite as the court had instructed. Instead, the board apparently took advantage of the opening Bryan's opinion had left when it noted that "ATS's policy does not consider a host of evaluative factors including race, which may in the end 'tip the balance' in favor of admission. Race is the sole decisive factor ATS considers in accepting students once the white 'cap' is met through random selection."

For 1998-99, the board made race one of three decisive factors. In order to take into account family income and native language as well as "race/national origin," the board adopted what the court would later call "a tortuous lottery system involving weighted percentages and multipliers."

Under this system, students were assigned three scores. Race was weighted as follows:

black	11 points
Hispanic	9 points
white	5 points
Asian/Pacific Islander	4 points

Students whose first language was not English received 3 points, English speakers 1 point. Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches got 2 points, all others 1 point. Each student's three scores were then *multiplied*, so that in the final calculation an Asian, English-speaking, middle-class child, for example, received 4 points (4 x 1 x 1 = 4), while a black, non-English-speaking, low-income child received 66 points (11 x 3 x 2 = 66). A computer-operated "lottery" then sorted the applicants on the basis of these final scores until it came up with an entering class approximating the county's population with regard to race, income (40 percent of Arlington residents are low-income), and language (43 percent are not native speakers of English).

For the 1998-99 school year, ATS had 162 applicants for 46 kindergarten spaces to be filled by lottery. The racial breakdown of the applicants was 69 percent white, 10 percent Hispanic, 9 percent black, 12 percent Asian. The eventual lottery winners were 54 percent white, 26 percent Hispanic, 10 percent black, and 9 percent Asian.

This time, a new set of disappointed parents sued, and Judge Bryan criticized the board even more harshly, calling the weighted lottery "a transparent attempt to circumvent *Tito*." His April 14 order leaves little room for interpretation: "Less than a year ago, this court held that diversity was not a compelling governmental interest justifying racial discrimination in ATS admission procedures. Defendants have come forward with nothing to convince the court that the interest of diversity has become more compelling in the intervening eleven months."

Despite this second defeat, the Arlington County School Board voted unanimously to appeal. "The Board's number one goal is to have a fair and equitable admission policy that meets the goal of diversity," explains Lisa Farbstein. In the meantime, the board suffered a third legal rebuff when its request for a stay of Bryan's order—allowing the board to honor the results of the weighted lottery until the appeal could be heard—was denied, and the board was required to hold a new, random lottery. Conducted on May 7, that lottery produced a kindergarten class (including siblings) that corresponded almost exactly with the applicant pool: 63 percent white, 10 percent black, 10 percent Hispanic, and 16 percent Asian.

What baffles some Arlington parents through all this is the board's refusal to acknowledge the popularity and effectiveness of the traditional school by expanding it to meet demand. Even though the program costs no more than an ordinary public school, there is no talk of duplicating it. Farbstein says the number of parents who want the alternative school is actually small—just "1.9 percent of the elementary-school population."

But this is not quite honest. There are 1,598 kindergarten students in the county, and a full 11 percent of them apply to ATS—more than three times as many as apply to the other elementary alternative school, Drew Model School. At Drew, students learn in multi-grade teams and progress through the curriculum according to their "individual learning needs." In recent years, Drew has easily accommodated all applicants.

Clearly, the traditional model has tremendous appeal. In fact, Arlington Traditional School seems close to the old public-school ideal: orderly, inspiring, competitive, safe—and open on an equal basis to all applicants. When it comes to students, race is not an issue for ATS principal Holly Hawthorne. She says, "I just want to teach them."

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Michael Moore, One-Trick Phony

By Matt Labash

Surveying the body of director Michael Moore's work, one is quickly overwhelmed by its scope. There was the 1989 documentary *Roger & Me*—an indictment of corporate greed, downsizing, and cavalier disregard for the working man. Then there was the mid-'90s television series *TV Nation*—an indictment of corporate greed, downsizing, and cavalier disregard for the working man. Throwing a change-up in 1996, Moore wrote *Downsize This!*—an indictment of downsizing, corporate greed, etc. And now in theaters is his new documentary, *The Big One*—an indictment of . . . well, Moore likes to keep fans guessing.

But to take this man's measure from his eclectic output would still be to miss his true dimensions. For Moore is so much more than the goalkeeper of the proletariat, the bra-snapper of corporate America, the auteur who repeats himself more often than a Tourette's patient singing "Bennie and the Jets." Moore, we are told, is "the great satirist of the 1990s" and "the last firecracker on the Fourth of July" (*Newsday*). He is "an essential aid to democracy" (Knight Ridder). He is a "working-class hero" (*Chicago Tribune*). He is a man who defies overstatement, as the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* proved when it called him "as dangerous as Mike Wallace—but a whole lot funnier." Pushing 300 pounds, Moore is actually as dangerous as *two* Mike Wallaces.

But that's not all. He's been compared to Mark Twain by the *New York Times*, to Voltaire by *Newsday*, to Mother Teresa by . . . himself. And it is precisely that self-regard—that propensity to concur with his clipping service—that's made Moore what he actually is: a preachy bore and one-trick phony whose work has become so sanctimoniously unamusing it could make Cesar Chavez pull for management.

It was not always so. In 1989, Moore, a virgin filmmaker and the former editor of an alternative newspaper in Flint, Michigan, delivered his critically acclaimed documentary *Roger & Me*. The film chronicled his two-year quest to confront Roger Smith, then chairman of General Motors, whose supposedly callous decision to close several GM plants had helped decimate Moore's hometown. Not only did *Roger* become the highest-grossing non-musical documentary in history, it almost singlehandedly resuscitated an ailing genre.

Pre-*Roger*, social-conscience documentaries (is there any other kind?) tended to be low-sugar, high-fiber affairs. Whether the subject was striking miners, Great Plains soil erosion, or copulating manatees, these pictures were more medicinal than entertaining. *Roger* was different, and it became to documentaries what the New Journalism had been to feature writing. Moore infused the form with subjective vitality, inserting himself into his narrative to drive it with a novelist's ingenuity. What he delivered in *Roger* was a dark and devastatingly funny social satire—a tautly edited trove of snappy narration, vivid characters, and cruel ironies.

Moore intercut his primary story (stalking the elusive Smith from yacht club to stockholder meeting to Grosse Pointe neighborhood) with inspired asides: the Flint gentry at a Gatsby lawn party where unemployed locals posed as human statues; sienna-haired golf-course biddies decrying lazy welfare dependents; animatronic autoworkers in a civic-renewal display singing praises to the robots destined to replace them; and the unemployed Rhonda the Bunny Lady selling rabbits for pets or clubbing them in her front yard to sell as meat.

As cinema, *Roger* was brilliant. As journalism, it was fraudulent—a point that helped cost Moore an Oscar nomination. Critics noted that some of Moore's chronology was pure fiction. His much-touted 30,000 GM layoffs came not in 1986, as he implied, but over the course of a decade and in several different states. He showed people getting evicted who'd never been GM workers. As the press began detailing discrepancies, Moore accused various journalists of lying or being GM tools and hung up on at least one of them in a snit.

Inflicting more durable damage was criticism from Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker*. She charged that

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Moore used his "leftism as a superior attitude. Members of the audience can laugh at ordinary working people, and still feel they're taking a politically correct position." As Moore traipsed from country club to headquarters lobby dressed like an unemployed lumberjack (ratty ballcap, plus-size smell-o-vision dungarees, drugstore-bin running shoes), he honed what would become his trademark tactic, the ambush interview. The formula is simple: With Dorothy Day dudgeon and Stuttering John subtlety, Moore crashes a scene—uninvited, cameras whirring and shooting from angles calculated to make twitchy, hog-jowled flacks, low-level functionaries, and polyblended rent-a-cops look stupid (all to the greater glory of the working class). His reluctant hosts demand that he stop filming or inform him that their CEO, caught unawares by Moore's impromptu visit, will not be attending his canned hunt.

Critics like Kael notwithstanding, a monster was born, as Moore fashioned himself the populist avenger. Invoking his lunchbucket ancestors who toiled in factories and joined sitdown strikes, Moore easily justified the hammershots he leveled at the working stiffs caught in his camera's gaze. Nearly every write-up noted Moore's humble beginnings: how he had financed *Roger* by selling his bed, how he owned only two pairs of big-boy jeans, how he had collected unemployment before getting a $3 million distribution deal from Warner Bros., how he had barely escaped (as if vaulting the barbed wire at Buchenwald) the GM assembly-line birthright of his father and uncles.

The fuller truth dribbled out more grudgingly. Not since Francis of Assisi has a man's geographic origin been so inexorably part of his identity. But the working-class upstart from Flint actually came from the nearby bedroom community of Davison. John Lusk, who went to high school with Moore, describes their suburb as "lily white, . . . solid middle class. It was idyllic. . . . But you'd think listening to Mike [that he] lived in the pits of the Flint depression." In interviews since celebrity found him, Moore's regular refrain has been, "I'm not supposed to be doing this anyway, I'm supposed to be building Buicks back in Flint." But that was a fate Moore had long ago escaped: He never worked a day on the assembly line.

Moore's blue-collar persona, it seems, is unsullied by any heavy lifting. The only life Moore "escaped" was a life of obscurity editing bird-cage-lining lesbian manifestoes and screeds on Central America in the weekly *Michigan Voice*. Before scourging GM for opportunistically closing plants to move to Mexico, Moore himself closed his paper to become editor of San Francisco's *Mother Jones* magazine in 1986. Though Moore flashes blue-collar thigh in nearly every media appearance, former *Voice* staffers say it was actually his mascot, Ben Hamper, a part-time *Voice* columnist and full-time GM worker, who was Moore's sole link to authentic auto-plant life.

In factory dispatches (which would become the blisteringly funny book *Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line*), Hamper painted a nuanced picture of GM that Moore's film seemed to miss. Despite the soul-killing monotony and frequent layoffs, Hamper wrote, shoprats were paid "handsome wages to mimic a bunch of overachieving simians." With all the benefits, regular raises, and tide-me-over severance checks, auto workers dubbed their employer "Generous Motors." The daily grind was lessened by doubling-up on routine jobs, giving workers on-the-clock leeway to take naps, compose rock operas, and get loaded like rivet guns on Mickey's Malt Liquor.

Before Moore fled Flint for the coast, he dropped by the plant (a field trip!) to hit rivets, act manly, and bid adieu to a life he'd never known. But when Moore wheeled into the parking lot, Hamper writes, it was "in his faithful Honda." Hamper, too, would become part of Moore's evolving myth.

As editor of *Mother Jones*, Moore was fired after four months. Both sides agree his termination was partly due to Moore's refusal to run a piece critical of the Sandinistas. The better marketing angle, however, was Moore's insinuation (in *Roger* and elsewhere) that trust-fund liberals drove him out because they objected to his first cover story's being written by a sweaty droog like Ben Hamper. Back in Flint, Hamper seemed unconcerned; he would write in *Rivethead* that he didn't know whether *Mother Jones* was a "rib joint or blaxploitation flick." Magazine sources, however, said they wanted Hamper to keep writing for them—and they let Moore go because he was an incompetent manager and hell to work for, not unlike the alleged slavedrivers back at GM.

Unemployed, Moore sulked through a depressing regimen of matinees and chocolate croissants. He then sued *Mother Jones* for $2 million, eventually winning a $58,000 settlement that would one day serve as seed money for his film. Free to return to his beloved Flint, Moore opted out once again—joining forces instead with Ralph Nader in Washington to start a political newsletter. (Moore so alienated Nader by the time his film debuted that Nader briefly climbed into bed with his old bête noire, General Motors.)

Once Moore hit the big time, most journalists swallowed his bootstrap revisionism, ignoring the less sexy reality that Moore had sipped liberally at the usual funding spigots. Laurence Jarvik, in a much-over-

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looked piece in *Montage* magazine, reported that Moore (who claimed he had never made more than $15,000 a year before *Roger & Me*) had been an NPR commentator, received two $20,000 grants from the MacArthur Foundation, secured a hefty advance from Doubleday for a book about Flint, and benefited from the largesse of Stewart Mott, the black-sheep GM scion who ran a family fund out of his New York penthouse where Moore sometimes stayed. (Moore, as is his way, accused Jarvik of being an envious liar.)

Though Moore's career has been one long, tiresome impression of a harlequin Reuther brother whistling the song of the working man while cracking the backs of corporate greedheads, he has had no problem adopting celebrity trappings or acting the part of the temperamental starlet. As early as 1990, when Moore was still fresh from the salt-of-the-earth mines, the director of the Sundance Film Festival complained that he was "overly demanding" and "made a scene" when he discovered his accommodations weren't as deluxe as Clint Eastwood's.

"Michael's the greediest man I've ever met," says one studio source. "I've been disturbed on vacations by agents shouting down the telephone at me [asking] how could we possibly expect Michael to fly business class rather than first class, and how could we expect him to stay anywhere other than the Four Seasons."

Kent Lemon

Moore not only bashes corporate titans, but also derides the "poseur Left" as out of touch with the hockey-watching line-dancers who inhabit his working-class biosphere. His own pose is that of the last leftist with an index finger on the pulse of the noble prole. This has earned him public censure from former friends like Alexander Cockburn, who excoriated Moore last year in the *New York Press*. "He was so full of s—t," explains Cockburn, "I just lost it."

As Cockburn had noticed, the self-proclaimed populist is literally a limousine liberal. In 1989, Moore told *Newsday* that he had a dream in which "the revolution started and there I was in this limo. I was banging on the windows, screaming 'No! No! Warner's made me ride this.' So I made them take back the limo." In reality, Moore did attend his Flint premiere in a chauffeured stretch chariot. And these days, he wouldn't dream of sending one back. In his book, he does an entire page of limo material, belittling his drivers as "by and large . . . a creepy bunch" who "always show up a half hour early and bug the hell out of you" (chauffeurs don't register as noble proles, but then they don't work in auto plants in Flint).

Moore also assumes the mantle of the last honest rube, saying people of his stripe are seldom afforded a voice—as if the entire entertainment industry were born in TriBeCa or Bel Air. But if Moore is a rube, he is one whose agents have been Andrew Wylie and Creative Artists, whose studios have been Warner Bros. and the Disney-owned Miramax, whose networks have been Murdoch's Fox and General Electric's NBC. For a Ritz-Carlton revolutionary like Moore, such concessions are sacrifices needed "to get the work out there."

Moore says he could return to life in Flint at any time and be happy; he was forced to leave, he says, because his "privacy was shot." Moore has opted instead for the tranquil solitude of the Upper West Side, where he has a $1.27 million 17th-floor apartment in a building complete with marble lobby, doorman, and fleet of dog-walkers. (He stays true to flyover country by also maintaining a lavish lake house in upstate Michigan.)

To be sure, Moore has given back some of his spoils by setting up a foundation/tax shelter with one-third of his *Roger & Me* proceeds—a useful hedge against charges of hypocrisy. For Moore has turned himself into the entertainment world's Jesse Jackson, a migratory Mau-Mauist showing up at corporations to demand concessions that will ultimately benefit him,

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leaving companies a choice between throwing him a bone and risking public humiliation. In his new film, *The Big One*, Moore gives chase to Nike chairman Phil Knight, who's been rebuked for using cheap labor in Indonesia by everyone from Kathie Lee Gifford to the Methodist Church. Contending that Americans would like a chance to sew the swooshes on our own crosstrainers, Moore tried to coerce Knight into putting a factory in Flint (a suggestion so ludicrous even the *Flint Journal* scoffed).

"THESE DAYS, EVERYONE . . . LIVES IN THEIR OWN FLINT, MICH.," SAYS MOORE—THOUGH UNEMPLOYMENT IN FLINT IS NOW 4.4 PERCENT.

Knight rebuffed Moore, but not before getting patted down for a $10,000 donation to Flint schools—a donation that Moore himself matched. Moore's generosity is hardly anomalous. He often kicks into the till of the Rust Belt Jakarta whose misfortune he so relentlessly pimps. ("These days, everyone . . . lives in their own Flint, Michigan," says Moore—though Flint's unemployment rate is now a respectable 4.4 percent, down from 27 percent when Moore began his odyssey in the late '80s.) But some who know him say his motives are less than altruistic.

Donald Priehs, Moore's high-school teacher, helped him get elected to the school board at the age of 18. Now Priehs echoes the sentiment of the *Flint Journal* and some of Moore's friends when he says, "Moore has always used Flint. . . . Michael is not the great benefactor."

Priehs recalls the beginnings of Moore's modus operandi: "He made a proposal one year that we abolish homecoming at Davison. You know why he wanted to? Because he himself is nothing but a big blob. He loathed the athletes because they got all the good girls. Michael couldn't have gotten a date if he'd put gold bullion on the table." To redeem what Priehs considers a revenge-of-the-nerds fantasy, Priehs says Moore, whom he labels a "conniving opportunist," wanted to donate the homecoming savings to UNICEF.

Moore claims to give half his income away to leftoid causes, independent filmmakers, and Flintians, though all my queries to verify this went unanswered (one of Moore's publicists said I lacked the "the proper tone"). Moore says he "does it quietly." Quietly, that is, if you discount the fact that he said this to a journalist, and that he invites CNN to tag along while he passes out Christmas turkeys, and that Miramax (distributor of *The Big One*) sends out press releases that they'll be donating half of their profits from the movie to Flint's working stiffs (at a time when the Department of Labor found that over 136 Miramax working stiffs were owed more than $80,000 in overtime—but Moore never got around to Miramax in his latest corporate-bashing spree).

Such grand gestures, of course, are contrivances to maintain Moore's authenticity. They allow him to continue prowling the country as a high-cholesterol Cassandra, prophesying ruin and worker revolts in the midst of a 94-month economic boom, with unemployment rates and union membership at record lows, and consumer confidence and disposable income at record highs.

To pull off such a pose, it takes a relentless breed of self-promoter. While most venerated directors pay homage to those from whom they take their inspiration (Woody Allen: Bergman; De Palma: Hitchcock; Scorsese: Godard), Moore gives his work a self-referential synergy that should have him suing himself for copyright infringement or paying himself for product placement. (Even his wedding invitation contained a guide to *Roger & Me* landmarks.)

Vowing never to do a sequel to *Roger*, he waited all of three years before producing *Pets or Meat*, a flaccid epilogue in which the Bunny Lady sells her rabbits as snake-food ("a metaphor," Moore said, for Flint auto workers' fate). His occasional magazine articles detail the successes of his films (*Roger & Me* was a Wheel of Fortune answer) and the machinations of his enemies (his one fictional feature, *Canadian Bacon*, was supposedly sandbagged by its own studio, not because it was unfunny, but because distributors feared its leftward slant was "too political" and might offend conservatives, a little-known Hollywood phobia).

Like *Roger & Me*, Moore's television newsmagazine *TV Nation* saw him regularly brutalizing such masters of the universe as Love Canal real-estate agents and Pakistani cab drivers. He also satirized broad targets who'd been so worked over they were slatless (Moore paid visits to the KKK and discovered—brace yourself—that they are *haters*). Though *TV Nation* was a ratings-basement habitué and earned quick cancellations on NBC and Fox, Moore is undeterred. He is not only reprising the show with financing from Great Britain, he is also writing a *TV Nation* book for superagent Judith Regan. That is, when he isn't working on his CBS sitcom *Better Days*, a show about—what else—four unemployed factory workers.

Now he presents *The Big One*—an exercise in *narcissisme vérité* the likes of which haven't been seen since

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John Lennon's 1969 *Self Portrait*, a 42-minute contemplation of the former Beatle's penis. Moore has just come off a tour promoting his movie, which is about a tour in which he's promoting his 1996 book, *Downsize This!* (which itself pays homage to all his own past projects).

But the only thing that's been downsized is Moore's artistic ambition. *The Big One* depicts bookstore audiences hugging and extolling and applauding Moore, who takes special care to announce his *New York Times* bestseller status. A typical testimonial from his media escort: "Michael is like a floor sample that we can all be." Our only reprieve is when Moore once again takes his guerrilla theater to the office parks of America, where several more badly permed, yellow-toothed lobby underlings are poleaxed for getting between Moore's ego and the camera.

But even vaster than Moore's ego is his hypocrisy. For when he bemoans "people today working longer . . . for less . . . with no job security" and says "people are frightened," he could be describing what it's like to work for Michael Moore. This is hardly news to Mooreologists. Vicious take-outs featuring Moore's ex-employees have appeared in the *New York Post*, *Salon*, and *New York* magazine. War stories include everything from Moore's discouraging union membership to his not adequately paying or crediting his subordinates. To mine such material once more might seem a gratuitous rehash. Then again, so is most of Moore's work.

It is striking how many former associates—all predisposed to side with Moore—bitterly revile him. Randy Cohen, a former Letterman writer and co-executive producer of *TV Nation* who was fired by Moore (though he remained contractually obligated to fork over ideas), offers a typical compliment: "I despise Mike and regard him as a vile and dishonorable man, but I think *Roger & Me* was terrific!"

Conversations with some dozen former employees turn up such descriptions of Moore as "mercurial," "demanding," "paranoid," and a "fork-tongued manipulator" who is "totally disingenuous" and "feeds on people's insecurities." Former *TV Nation* staffers compare their working conditions to "a sweatshop," a "repressive police state," "indentured servitude," and a "concentration camp." One former staffer says, "Most people hated Michael, not because he was a perfectionist, but because he was an a—hole." A former producer, casting about for a despot appropriately "large, with gluttonous appetites—not just ruthless, but sadistic," finally compares a stint with Moore to "working for Idi Amin—without the laughs." Another staffer simply states, "My parents want him dead."

Former employees tell tales of random firings, of no health benefits, of having to crank out daily story-idea quotas that often went unread. Like a surly bear, Moore required gentle care and regular feeding. He often ate in front of staffers held hostage well into the night, their stomachs rumbling as he gorged on chocolate confections and Chinese takeout. They tell stories of Moore's fighting "tooth and nail to try to avoid paying writers in the Writers Guild"; of his threatening to fire the assistant who sent a yellow cab instead of a limo to retrieve him from the airport; of his pouting in his office for hours in the middle of shoots and making assistants cover the windows with tape so he couldn't be seen.

Haskell Wexler, one of the world's foremost cinematographers, worked with Moore on *Canadian Bacon*. Wexler says that Moore, who "didn't know s—t from shinola" about making feature films, chose to "maintain his adversarial view toward . . . everything and everybody around him." Moore seemed intent, he says, on proving his bona fides by "abusing himself gastronomically" with regular McDonald's hamburger work stoppages that allowed Moore to feel "closer to the Real People."

Wexler himself not only has won Academy Awards for films like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, but also has had a distinguished career shooting left-wing documentaries, working with everyone from Jane Fonda to the Weathermen. Of Moore, Wexler says, "He's not unlike a lot of people I used to know in the left-wing movement. They love humanity and hate people."

FORMER EMPLOYEES COMPARE THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS TO "INDENTURED SERVITUDE" AND A "CONCENTRATION CAMP."

Finding anyone not currently employed by Moore to offer unvarnished praise proves a challenge. One former staffer asks if I want the number of someone who likes him. "Sure," I say gamely. "I'm sorry," she backpedals, "I can't think of anyone."

"You won't find a range of opinions," Randy Cohen confirms. "You'll find everyone has a range of anecdotes to illustrate the same opinion."

Or almost. In a typically inane passage of *Downsize This!*, Moore's slapdash satire of the political landscape, he pens a chapter proclaiming "O.J. Is Innocent." O.J. Simpson, it would stand to reason, might be the one exception to Cohen's claim.

After I faxed Simpson, he called me from his new

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home in Pacific Palisades. "Obviously, I like Michael Moore," says O.J., who met the filmmaker when Simpson was a surprise guest on Moore's talk-show pilot last fall. "I think he is an unusual, independent person, and I've learned to appreciate independent thinking more today than ever before."

Moore is so independent, in fact, that he made a defense of O.J. that eluded even Simpson's excuse-rich defense team. For the populist avenger, the most racially charged double murder in history boils down to an issue of class. O.J., according to Moore, couldn't possibly have killed Ron and Nicole—because O.J. is rich. And rich people, who won't do their own shopping or de-grout their own toenails, wouldn't stoop to offing their ex-wives when "there are so many unemployed, desperate individuals" willing to ice someone for $200.

When I confronted Simpson with Moore's logic, he seemed dumbfounded: "I don't know, I think you're just as responsible if you hire a person as if you did it yourself." But forging consensus between the two leading proponents of the O.J.-is-innocent theory proved impossible.

I was unable to reach Moore after leaving several messages at his unlisted home phone, his unlisted work phone, and with a battery of publicists. Though he left one after-hours message for me, promising he'd call again, he never did, despite a round of follow-up attempts on my part. One suspects, however, that the Moore-Simpson rift could be easily resolved. The two, after all, are peas in a pod: Both have a tenuous grasp of reality. Both make embarrassing assertions of their own probity. And both, upon growing cranky, tend to snap off people's heads.

There is one minor difference, however. Moore, the People's Filmmaker, who preys on gulping, unwitting victims as they flee the white light of his ambushes, eluded me over the course of a one-month publicity tour. A couple of faxes to the reclusive People's Killer, and O.J. Simpson called right back. ♦

BIBI'S ENDGAME

Behind the Sound and Fury of the High-Stakes Peace Talks

By Charles Krauthammer

I. OPENING GAMBIT

All through the night of January 15, 1997, the Israeli cabinet was in agonizing debate. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, barely six months in office, was asking his cabinet to approve giving up Hebron. For its entire history, the Likud party had rejected the idea of giving up any part of the Land of Israel. And this was not just any land. After Jerusalem, Hebron is the holiest city in Judaism. (By the peculiar logic of the Middle East, the Arab claim to Jerusalem—Islam's third holiest city, it is said—is considered natural and just. Israel's claim to Hebron, Judaism's second holiest city, is deemed eccentric, indeed aggressive.)

Netanyahu's case was clear. Like it or not, the country had been committed to the Oslo peace agreement, and there was no way to turn back. Hebron had to be relinquished. His cabinet understood full well what that meant. Netanyahu was proposing an ideological earthquake. It was Hebron today and much, much more tomorrow. It meant that in "final-status" negotiations with the Palestinians, even larger pieces of territory would have to be given up.

But the immediate problem for the cabinet that night was what lay between Hebron and the final-status talks. Yes, they would clench their teeth and give up Hebron. Yes, they would prepare for even larger final-status concessions. But under Oslo, Israel was committed to further unilateral withdrawals during the "interim period" leading up to final status. Who would determine those withdrawals?

Under Oslo, the extent of the withdrawals ("further redeployments" or FRDs in diplospeak) was up to Israel. And the Clinton administration had

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assured Israel in the Hebron negotiations that this remained the case.

That night, however, the ministers were uneasy. They did not want to find themselves a few months down the road stampeded into giving away more land—Israel's bargaining chips—before even having reached the final-status talks. They wanted an unequivocal written reaffirmation from the United States that it would honor the Oslo agreement to leave the size of these FRDs to Israel.

At 11:00 P.M. they got it. U.S. ambassador Martin Indyk sent the cabinet secretary an urgent fax laying out the official U.S. position: "Further redeployment phases are issues for implementation by Israel rather than issues for negotiation with the Palestinians." A subsequent letter of assurance from Secretary of State Warren Christopher made clear that the "further redeployments" were an Israeli responsibility. A few hours later, in the small hours of the morning, the cabinet voted to withdraw from Hebron.

Fast-forward sixteen months. Indyk has climbed the greasy pole and is now assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs. Madeleine Albright is secretary of state. Israel has withdrawn from Hebron. And it has offered an FRD surrendering a further 9 percent of the West Bank to Arafat. Yet on May 5 in London, Albright tells Netanyahu that 9 percent is unacceptable and demands 13 percent—no, 13.1 percent. She warns of unspecified consequences if Israel does not accede to this ultimatum.

Indyk's midnight fax is less than a memory.

This dispute has been portrayed by the Clinton administration, and echoed in a compliant press, as an Israeli squabble over 4 percent (actually 2 percent: Netanyahu has indicated that he might go to 11 percent). It is nothing of the sort. What is at stake is, first, whether Israel gets to decide what is required for its own security, and, second and perhaps even more important, whether the Clinton administration's assurances to Israel can be believed.

Why are these principles so important? Because the land Israel is now giving up is as close to its major cities as Bethesda is to Washington, as close as Kennedy airport is to Manhattan. Israel is surrendering to its historic enemy—an enemy still committed to Israel's destruction—what are essentially the suburbs of its major cities. To deny Israel at this stage the right to decide which hill or pass or wadi it can safely surrender is to summon it to an assisted suicide.

Furthermore, from the days of Henry Kissinger and the Sinai withdrawals, the United States has encouraged Israel to take territorial risks by offering concrete compensation—jet fighters, early-warning stations, diplomatic commitments—to try to make up for the security assets being relinquished. If these assurances can be voided cavalierly, then every Israeli withdrawal becomes nothing more than an exercise in unilateral retreat.

Accordingly, London did not go well. Netanyahu cited the Christopher assurance and told Albright no.

II. Middle Game

The State Department is not very pleased with Netanyahu. Things were so much easier with Shimon Peres. Peres considered the very notion of bargaining chips and reciprocal obligations to be a remnant of "old thinking," obsolete and unnecessary in the new Middle East of peace and brotherhood that he and his partner Yasser Arafat had ushered in.

So determined was Peres to let nothing stand in the way of his peace process that in 1996, for example, he welcomed a sham revision of the Palestinian National Charter as "the most important ideological change that has occurred in the Middle East in the past 100 years." (The Palestine National Council left the revision to a committee; the committee never met.) Peres would blithely have given up the bulk of the West Bank to Arafat in interim FRDs and entered the final-status endgame quite naked of bargaining chips.

There is a logic here. Who needs chips when you're talking to partners? Netanyahu and Likud, however, have another view of the peace process. They take Arafat at his word that the peace process is a struggle, a zero-sum game between adversaries, and not some magic of brotherhood and peace where Benelux breaks out in a land soaked with the blood of martyrs.

What is Arafat's view of Oslo? "The peace agreement which we signed is an 'inferior peace,'" says Arafat, most recently on April 18 on Egyptian TV. This phrase has a very specific meaning in the Arab lexicon. It refers to the Khudaibiya peace pact which the prophet Mohammed made with the Koreish tribe. Mohammed broke it within two years, attacking and destroying the Koreish. "Of course, I do not compare myself to the prophet," says Arafat, "but I do say that we must learn from his steps and those of Saladin." (Saladin made an armistice with the Crusaders, then declared a jihad and took Jerusalem.)

Because American diplomats ignore and discount such clear expressions of Arafat's disdainfully contingent view of Oslo, they are puzzled by Netanyahu's strategy, a strategy designed to engage Arafat's zero-sum strategy on its own terms. Everyone professes

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puzzlement at Netanyahu, always asking where he's going and whether he even knows where he is going. But his direction is not hard to fathom. His goal is to confront Oslo as it is—not as it is imagined—and to bring realism to the fantasists of both the hard Right and the dreamy Left.

First, he brought the Right into Oslo. Netanyahu was never a Greater Israel ideologue. As far back as the 1980s he understood that in the end there would have to be "territorial compromise." The question is how much territory and for what kind of compromise. Hebron was the Israeli hardliners' Rubicon, and Netanyahu made them cross it. It ended any serious representation of rejectionists in the Israeli ruling structure. Why, Arik Sharon, the hero of the Right and bugaboo of all correct-thinking peace lovers, is the one who came up with the current 9 percent withdrawal offer. There is practically no politician of any real authority or following in the country who is talking about anything other than how much to return for what.

This service to peace rendered by Netanyahu goes largely unrecognized and entirely unappreciated in the West. On the other hand, his second service—injecting realism into Israel's negotiating position and, by lowering inflated Palestinian expectations, into Arafat's as well—has earned him nothing but opprobrium from the West. By the time Netanyahu came to power, the utter casualness of Peres's concessions had led Arafat to assume that he would come out of the Oslo middle game—the interim period, with its Israeli FRDs—with as much as 80-90 percent of the West Bank in his pocket.

Netanyahu understood that for Israel this is insanity. Under those circumstances, Israel would enter the life-and-death endgame—the final-status negotiations over permanent borders, Palestinian statehood, Jerusalem, water, refugees—entirely naked. Arafat would bring in his perennial chit, peace (his threats of renewed violence are never far beneath the surface), and Israel would have already given up its chit, land.

Netanyahu's major achievement in his two years in office has been to lower Arafat's expectations. This has understandably made Arafat cross and displeased the State Department. But it has worked: Arafat now knows that he is not going to get 90 percent of the disputed territories in the middle game. The current bitter negotiations are over how close he will come to 40 percent. (He already has 27 percent.)

This achievement has come at high cost. Having rejected Peres's easy downward path of giving it all away in the middle game, Israel has suffered diplomatically and Netanyahu politically. The lovey-dovey multilateral conferences—the tip of the hat and the handshake from the likes of Qatar and Morocco that Peres so cherished—are in suspension. The Arab grant of legitimacy to Israel has largely been withdrawn. Critics blame this on Netanyahu's blundering. In fact, it demonstrates how flimsy and insubstantial these so easily reversible gestures were in the first place.

Netanyahu himself has been subject to personal attacks of a savagery rare even by Israeli standards. It got so out of hand that one member of the peace camp wrote a celebrated and now notorious article in the leading liberal daily, *Ha'aretz*, entitled "The Year of Hating Bibi." Ari Shavit argued that the hostility of Israel's Left-dominated elites to Netanyahu had reached such pathological proportions that the phenomenon could be explained only as an irrational projection onto him of all the disappointments and frustrations felt by the Left as its illusions about Oslo had crumbled.

Netanyahu is undeterred. And not just, as conventional wisdom has it, for reasons of coalition politics. Getting out of the middle game with some substantial part of the West Bank still in hand remains his considered strategy. And it is popular. Ronald Reagan used to say that in the end what counts is not critics but box office. Netanyahu, despite his critics, leads in the polls. He reflects the realism of a very realistic Israeli public.

III. Endgame

The current impasse concerns what shape—literally—Israel and the Palestinian territory will have at the *start* of the endgame. The rub is that, whatever the extent of the current Israeli FRD—9 percent of the West Bank, or 13 percent, or something in between—Arafat insists that Israel owes him yet another FRD *after that*.

Technically, he is right. But technically, too, the Israelis can make this third FRD as small as they want. (Indeed, they could give Albright her cherished 13 percent by making the current FRD, say, 9 percent and making a final FRD of 4 percent.) Understand: Netanyahu is prepared to swallow Albright's 13 percent. But only if that clearly puts an end to the middle game. No more FRDs. On to final-status negotiations.

The problem is that Arafat is balking and the administration has maneuvered itself into the position of negotiating on Arafat's behalf. The only path through this crisis is clear: Israel will have to knuckle under to Albright's 13 percent ultimatum, and Arafat will have to forgo any substantial third FRD and content himself for the time being with about 40 percent

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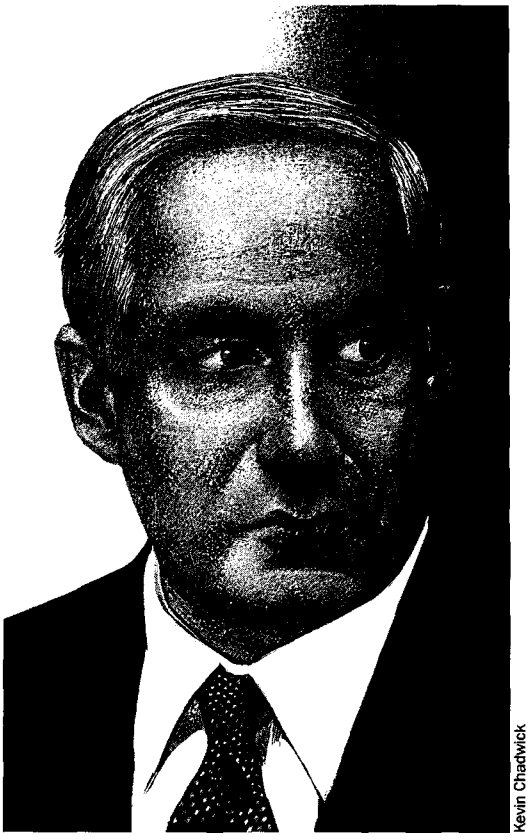
of the prize. Not bad, considering that five years ago the only real estate he controlled was in Tunisia.

The endgame—final-status talks—can then begin. And then what?

It may turn out that the endgame is unplayable. It is not for nothing that the original Oslo negotiators, who found such comity and common purpose, could themselves not even begin to decide such sensitive issues as Jerusalem, final borders, refugees, and water. They kicked all that into the safe and distant future. After five years of a poisonous middle game filled with terrorism and mistrust, it is even less likely that these conundrums will now be solved.

The more likely scenario is the following: Israel and the Palestinian Authority negotiate fruitlessly for a year. On May 4, 1999, the date on which these negotiations are supposed to have concluded, Arafat unilaterally declares a Palestinian state.

Arafat has threatened to do this. He has recently backed off under pressure from Albright, but this backing off, like his promises, is to be treated with skepticism. If he calculates in May 1999 that he can safely declare statehood, he will do it. He can be assured of immediate recognition from perhaps 150 countries, including all of Europe. The vital question is what the United States will do. American recognition is the key to real statehood. It clears the way for U.N. membership, acceptance in all other international bodies, and undisputed legitimacy.


Kevin Chadwick

Benjamin Netanyahu

Whichever way the United States moves, Israel's response is foreordained. It will annex the 60 percent or so of the West Bank still under its military control. This is almost entirely empty land. (Remember: 98 percent of Palestinians are under Arafat's rule today.) This would establish for Israel a security belt between it and Palestine, a state with which Israel's relationship would be one of confrontation—and without Oslo or any other principles to guide that relationship.

The Palestinians would undoubtedly challenge this annexation and claim the 60 percent for themselves. The result would be an intense crisis and possibly war.

The key question for U.S. negotiators now is how to avoid this dread scenario. How to keep the endgame from degenerating into mutual unilateralism next May?

The best way to forestall a unilaterally declared Palestinian state is for the United States to make absolutely clear that it will recognize no Palestinian state that is not the product of a negotiated settlement. That and that alone will make Arafat pause before bringing on the whirlwind. Sure, he'll get recognition from Zimbabwe and Malaysia, even France. But in the end, it is Washington that counts. And he may not want to risk American ostracism with a step that Washington has made clear it will reject.

What is wrong with Palestinian statehood? Wouldn't this finally get one of the stumbling blocks to peace out of the way? Don't even Israelis already know that there will be a Palestinian state? Of course they do. But unilateral, as opposed to negotiated, statehood carries huge dangers. Two of the immutable attributes of a state are its ability to arm itself as it pleases and its ability to conclude alliances as it pleases. These are the two conditions that Israel cannot tolerate in a Palestinian state nestled up against its major cities. It would be suicidal for Israel to permit an armed Palestine allied with, say, Syria and Iraq. Even Israeli doves, who welcome a Palestinian state, have always insisted that it be demilitarized and not permitted to station allied Arab armies on its soil.

Which is why Hillary Clinton's endorsement of a Palestinian state was so disastrous. First, because she placed no restrictions on what it would look like and what it could do. She said explicitly that the Palestinian state should be "on the same footing as any other state." But a Palestinian state like all others—i.e., militarized and allied—is a prescription for war.

Second, because she demanded no quid pro quo. She signaled to Arafat that he could have his state for free without having to make any concessions. Was

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Mrs. Clinton launching a trial balloon on behalf of the administration? No one knows. But her statement certainly was read that way in the Middle East. It might therefore have given Arafat hope that if he does declare unilateral independence, Hillary's husband will follow suit with recognition.

Arafat's goal is clear. He wants his state, and he wants it to encompass as much of the West Bank as possible. Statehood is America's to give. Territory is Israel's. When Arafat concludes that he will need to give in order to get, he'll deal. If Arafat understands that he will get statehood and territory only in the context of successful final-status talks, his mind will be concentrated on the wisdom of (1) quickly concluding the current middle game and (2) making the concessions necessary to get a final-status deal with Israel.

This is not quite the beginning of the end. But it certainly is the end of the beginning. Despite the current calculated gloom, with realism on all sides a deal is still very possible. Whether it will hold longer than Mohammed's Khudaibiya agreement, however, is another matter. ♦

A Bank Too Large?

Why Congress Shouldn't Swallow the Citigroup Deal

By Irwin M. Stelzer

Sandy Weill and John Reed are on a roll. The merger of their companies, insurance giant Travelers and banking colossus Citicorp, has now received the blessing of the House, which passed a banking deregulation bill in May that would legalize the deal. True, the bill squeaked through by only one vote, but a win is a win, and resistance is softening in the Senate.

Weill dropped in on Alfonse D'Amato, chairman of the Senate banking committee, and persuaded him to schedule mid-June hearings on a companion bill. It didn't take a lot of persuading, even though earlier this spring the junior senator from New York said he couldn't find time in his committee's crowded schedule to consider the legislation that would permit the creation of the massive Citigroup conglomerate. D'Amato, facing a bitter reelection campaign, is putting together a campaign chest that will permit him to bury his opponent under a barrage of television ads. In the past five years, D'Amato has received almost $3 million from his Wall Street supporters and persuaded them to contribute millions more to the races of favored Senate colleagues. His willingness to push new banking legislation isn't exactly technology-to-China, but it does have the odor of a quid in anticipation of a quo.

Irwin M. Stelzer is director of regulatory policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

D'Amato's hearings will come at a time when the economy is booming—the stock market has added $1 trillion to Americans' wealth in the first quarter of this year alone—and business leaders seem omnipotent. America's corporations are today the envy of the world and are widely seen, with some justification, as the source of our prosperity. Weill and Reed are hoping to parlay the current popularity of the business sector into quick passage of the legislation they need to go ahead with their merger.

But there is good reason to pause and consider whether legislation that allows such consolidation of the banking and financial services sector might not hand Europe and, eventually, a recovering Asia a leg up in the international competitiveness league. The American economy has been leading the world in growth and job creation thanks in large part to the dynamic role played by small businesses and the entrepreneurs who create them. It is only recently that Europe, in the person of Brussels policy wonks, has conceded it must do something to emulate America's friendly environment for venture capitalists—who invest in thousands of young companies every year, hoping some will grow into the next generation of Microsofts and Intels.

But America is blessed not only with gutsy venture capitalists. We also have thousands of banks—too many to please Wall Street's green-eyeshade types, who think giant banks are more efficient and hence

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more profitable. But not too many for the small-business owners who would rather meet with a local banker when in need of credit than stand in line at the branch office of a financial conglomerate. The question then is whether—at the very moment that its economic model stands as the unrivaled envy of the world—America is about to emulate Europe, whose handful of giant banks are famously indifferent to entrepreneurs. Which brings us to the merger of Citicorp and Travelers.

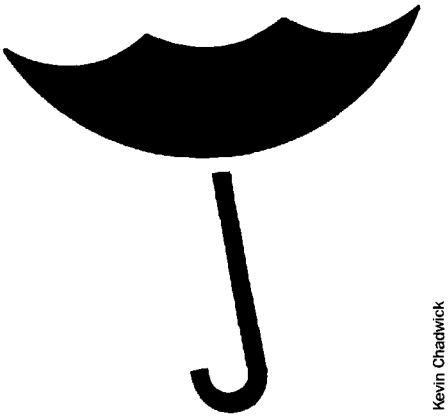
It's easy to see what's in the deal for Sandy Weill, the Travelers chairman. The son of Polish-Jewish immigrants, Weill now stands at the pinnacle of the financial services industry, astride a colossus that will serve more than 100 million customers in 100 countries. It's easy, too, to see what's in this deal for Citicorp chairman John Reed. He can now look back with satisfaction on a career in which he has converted a troubled bank into one of the world's premier financial institutions, with $700 billion in assets.

And it's even easy to see what's in the deal for shareholders. The market seems to think that one-plus-one makes something more than two, and for all I know it is right. After all, partly based on past consolidations, investors have bid up the shares of big money-center banks by 600 percent over the past decade, twice the increase in the market as a whole. Of course there is also the little matter of yoking the very different personalities of Weill and Reed into a team that will pull in the same direction. The early betting is that the 65-year-old Weill will soon preside at the 59-year-old Reed's going-away party. But let's give everyone the benefit of the doubt, and assume that Weill and Reed are smart enough to accommodate each other's foibles, and to figure out how to make this giant operation run smoothly.

Then there are consumers. Despite the whining of the usual consumer activists, there is no need to worry about consumers, since all of the markets in which the new Citigroup will be selling are reasonably competitive. If consumers don't like what Citigroup is offering, they can go elsewhere (although the number of elsewheres seems to be shrinking at an accelerating pace).

Weill and Reed say that one of the main advantages of the merger is that it will provide the new behemoth with numerous opportunities for what is called "cross-selling." The pot of gold at the end of the cross-selling rainbow is substantial. Mercer Management Consulting says its data show that 10 percent of a bank's customers typically produce 90 percent of its profits—and these are the customers who use several of the bank's products. Presumably, Citicorp will persuade its credit-card customers to buy their insurance from Travelers, Travelers will persuade its policyholders to switch their checking accounts to Citibank, and so on and on until all customers end up availing themselves of what bankers now call "a single delivery system"—one-stop shopping at the new financial supermarket.

This is, of course, highly unlikely, as anyone who has ever tried cross-selling can tell you. Weill must remember the experience of American Express. When he was an executive with that company, it tried to concoct a financial supermarket by buying Shearson Loeb Rhoades. The effort failed, and American Express finally gave up, selling the brokerage company to Primerica, now Travelers. Prudential tried to convert its strength in insurance into securities sales, and lost over $1 billion on limited partnerships. Sears Roebuck acquired Dean Witter with the idea of marketing stocks through its many retail outlets; this effort, now derisively known as selling "stocks and socks," failed miserably.



Kevin Chadwick

Anyone who still thinks that cross-selling has the potential for profit that Weill and Reed ascribe to it should have a word with Richard Kovacevich, chief executive of Norwest, the Minneapolis bank that, with $96 billion in assets, is the ninth largest in the United States. A former Citicorp executive, Kovacevich told the *Financial Times* that Citicorp is "probably averaging two products for every customer, just like everyone else, and adding another hundred products to the mix they offer isn't going to make much difference." Consumers, it seems, regard products such as credit cards and home-equity loans as free-standing, and will take such products from whoever offers the best combination of price and service. And consumers will ultimately rule on the merits of the cross-selling strategy. If they find one-stop shopping convenient, Citigroup will be a big winner. Otherwise, it will just be big. That is, assuming the merger happens at all, which it won't if the Senate doesn't go along.

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There are three things that D'Amato and his banking committee colleagues have to worry about as they listen to the parade of Wall Street deal-makers who will importune them to abandon the old-fashioned notion that it is in the nation's interest to keep various parts of the financial services industry separate from one another.

The first is the precedent that might be created if Congress allows itself to be steamrollered by two giant financial institutions into passing legislation to legitimize an action that violates the law as it now stands. Weill and Reed make no secret of the fact that they hope Congress, faced with a fait accompli, will have no choice but to sanctify their marriage. Whatever the merits of the merger, and of the bill before the Senate, it can't be a very good idea to invite any businessman, unhappy with legislation that sets limits on his behavior, to ignore the law and then pressure Congress to change it. What a temptation to put before Bill Gates: Write contracts that violate the antitrust laws, and then persuade Congress that you are so big, so important, so great a source of campaign funds, that the Sherman Act should be repealed or amended to accommodate you.

The second important policy issue is the effect that the Citicorp-Travelers merger and the other giant bank mergers in the works will have on the conduct of monetary policy. Citibank and others in its weight class have always been considered "too big to fail" by the Federal Reserve Board. That means that when they are in trouble—a circumstance in which Citibank found itself as recently as 1991, when it was struggling to survive—the Fed must keep the interest rates it charges these banks low, so that they can profitably re-lend the money to commercial borrowers. This, whether or not the condition of the economy requires such a policy. Imagine, now, that the Travelers insurance arm of Citigroup is in trouble, and threatens to pull down the banking arm. The Fed will then have to jigger U.S. monetary policy to save Citigroup from itself. Even though Fed officials profess to be unconcerned about this prospect, many in Congress feel this is not a chance worth taking.

Finally, there is the problem this wave of mergers creates for small businesses. Llewellyn King, publisher of the always interesting *White House Weekly*, calls the current merger wave "a catastrophe in the making . . . [for] small business." A small-businessman who wants to borrow $500,000 from a small bank deals with the chairman, writes King. If he takes hat in hand and goes to a large bank, he deals with a "loan officer who hides behind a loan committee made up of other clerks." In King's view, it is America's small banks, lending to myriad small businesses, that enable our

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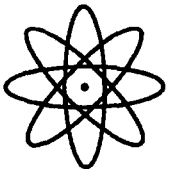

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economy to outperform Europe's, where a few large banks in each country are notorious for their shoddy treatment of small businesses.

I can supplement King's observations with my own experience when starting a small business. The loan officer at Chase, then a New York giant, could barely contain his amusement at the impertinence of a group of young economists seeking to borrow a few dollars from his august institution to start, of all things, a consulting firm with no hard assets. Fortunately, tiny Irving Trust Company (alas, since swallowed up in some long-ago merger), in the person of an old-fashioned look-you-in-the-eye banker, saw things differently, and helped us to start a business that eventually created hundreds of jobs.

King and I are not unique. A *Wall Street Journal* study of the five biggest bank mergers showed that the merged banks' small-business lending declined by 6 percent, while their overall lending increased. "By contrast, small-business lending by the six biggest banks that didn't go through mergers increased 7.5 percent over the same period." So found the *Wall Street Journal*, hardly a hotbed of antimerger sentiment.

IF THE CURRENT WAVE OF MERGERS WHITTLES THE NUMBER OF BANKS DOWN TO A FEW MEGA-INSTITUTIONS, WOE BETIDE SMALL BUSINESSES.

There's worse. Although ordinary consumers can simply walk away from one-stop shopping if they choose, small businesses are not so well situated. The typical small-businessman in need of a bank loan is street-smart enough to know that his chances of wringing a "yes" from a loan officer will not be increased if he gives his insurance business to someone else. Picture this: The potential borrower is sitting across the desk from the loan officer, who quietly wonders who handles the supplicant's insurance business. And who his stockbroker is. Only a dunce would fail to get the hint that there is an implicit tie between the availability of the loan and the borrower's willingness to bring the rest of his business to the one-stop conglomerate. And only a loan officer insensitive to his prospects for advancement would fail to ask the questions that would permit him to boast of his cross-selling prowess. Conversely, a loan officer might well be tempted to lend money to a marginal or poor credit risk in return for the promise of the borrower's insurance business. This would expose the banking system to risks it should not be bearing, risks that might shake it in a business downturn.

If the Citicorp-Travelers merger combines with the $60 billion merger of BankAmerica and NationsBank, the $30 billion merger of Banc One and First Chicago, and their inevitable imitators to whittle the number of banks down to a few mega-institutions, woe betide small businesses. Free-market theoreticians tell us there is no reason to worry: If the megabanks abuse small businesses, or merely fail to serve them well, new banks will arise to cater to them. The theory assumes that it is relatively easy to open a bank. But experience with industries as highly regulated as banking suggests that regulators are none too eager to allow newcomers to try their hand at regulated business. Failure by a new entrant causes a regulator more grief than does a refusal to grant the necessary permission in the first place.

It is true, of course, that no one can be certain the merger wave now rolling over the banking industry will be harmful to credit-seeking small-businessmen. But the antitrust laws do not require the certainty that an anticompetitive result will occur. All they require is a reasonable probability—more than a slight possibility but less than total certainty—that the mergers under review are likely to result in a substantial lessening of competition or a tendency to create a monopoly. The laws are aimed at nipping monopoly power in its incipiency.

If the antitrust and regulatory authorities decide that the market for credit for small businesses is a competitive arena separate from the other markets in which the new megabanks will operate, and that newcomers cannot readily enter it and challenge existing banks—those are questions that can be answered only by the careful empirical analysis that is the routine stuff of antitrust inquiries—then they may challenge these mergers, rather than leave small businesses to the tender mercies of a dwindling group of increasingly remote banks.

The Senate, too, may still decide that these banks create insurmountable competitive and regulatory problems. In any event, Congress shouldn't be stampeded into changing the existing laws merely because some very important institutions have chosen to defy them—in the hope that such defiance will be rewarded with the amendments they have thus far been unable to obtain in an orderly, democratic manner. So don't assume that there will be a Citigroup in America's future. Weill and Reed still have a lot of persuading to do before their legislative and regulatory chaperones allow them to cohabit in the same executive tower. ♦

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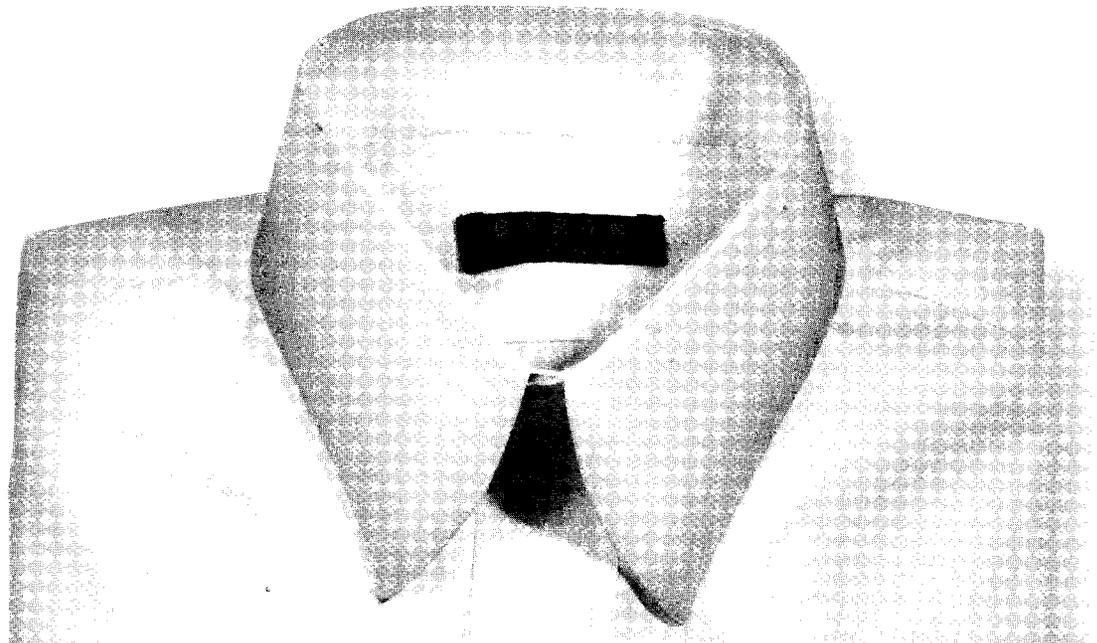

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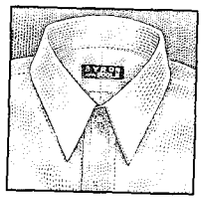

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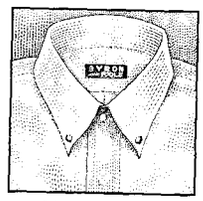

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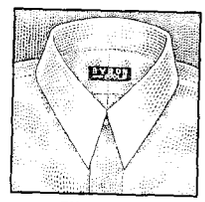

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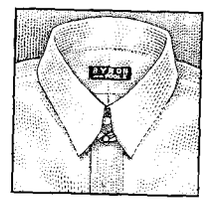

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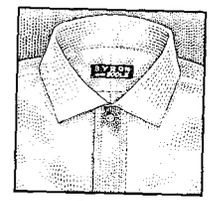

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The Picture of Oscar Wilde

From Reading Gaol to Broadway

By David Skinner

It was a hundred years ago that Oscar Wilde fell from the heights of literary London to a jail cell in Reading, and there is at present in America a virtual Greek festival of theater, film, and book projects making a cultural moment of the greatest wit ever to grace a buttonhole with a green carnation.

Showing on Broadway is David Hare's *The Judas Kiss*, starring Liam Neeson, and showing off-Broadway is *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* by Moises Kaufman. Julian Mitchell's film *Wilde*, starring Stephen Fry, is now in theaters.

For devoted readers, Karl Beckson has assembled *The Oscar Wilde Encyclopedia*, the kind of reference book only writers like Shakespeare and Dickens used to enjoy. Merlin Holland—Wilde's grandson and the man who recently determined that a much-reprinted picture, supposedly of Wilde cross-dressed as Salomé, is actually of a Hungarian (and female) light-opera singer—has just published the family's collection of photographs, *The Wilde Album*.

Richard Ellmann's standard 1987 biography *Oscar Wilde* remains in print, as do early memoirs by Frank Harris and George Bernard Shaw and Gary Schmidgall's 1994 *The Stranger Wilde*. Just out in paperback is Juliet Gardiner's *Oscar Wilde*, a lighter popular biography, and brought back into print for the occasion is the Wilde volume in the "Literary Lives" series from Thames & Hudson. And that's to say nothing of the dozens of new literary studies such as Jonathan Fryer's *André & Oscar: The Literary Friendship of André Gide and Oscar Wilde*.

In much of this centenary boom, Wilde is celebrated not as a great writer, but as a gay writer—interest in his work not even a close second to interest in his sexuality. He may have been the most applauded playwright of the nineteenth century, a poet, essayist, novelist, and as sharp a coiner of wicked epigrams as English has ever known. But what is that compared to the fact that he was prosecuted for gross indecency in 1895, served two years in prison, and died a broken man in 1900 at the age of forty-six? As one playgoer said at a showing of *Gross Indecency*, "He was a great writer and they treated him horribly." In the deadly sincerity of 1990s America, the most insincere wit of 1890s England has become a poster-boy for anti-judgmentalism: "St. Oscar, the homosexual martyr."

National Portrait Gallery, London

There has been some reaction against this dismissal of Wilde's work in favor of his life—and against the deliberate ignoring of those parts of his life (like his return to Catholicism before his death) that ill accord with the preferred vision of a brave homosexual victim of Victorian hypocrisy. The actor Stephen Fry has decried attempts to portray Wilde "primarily as a gay martyr." In the *New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik has retold Wilde's life in a way that shows how much a creature of his own time, not ours, he was.

But even these reactions against the usurping of Wilde for modern purposes fail to treat him in a systematic way. There's something just too fascinating about his life and personality, some lure that seems to prevent a grappling with his work: A gesture toward the dramatic perfection of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a deprecating wave at weaknesses in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and even the best of critics are off once again on the inescapable tale of his life—and especially the story of how (with the slander suit he brought against the Marquis of Queensberry for illiterately accusing him of "posing as a Somdomite") Wilde like some mad Victorian Oedipus instigated his own destruction.

The fact remains, however, that Wilde's work and the ideas in them

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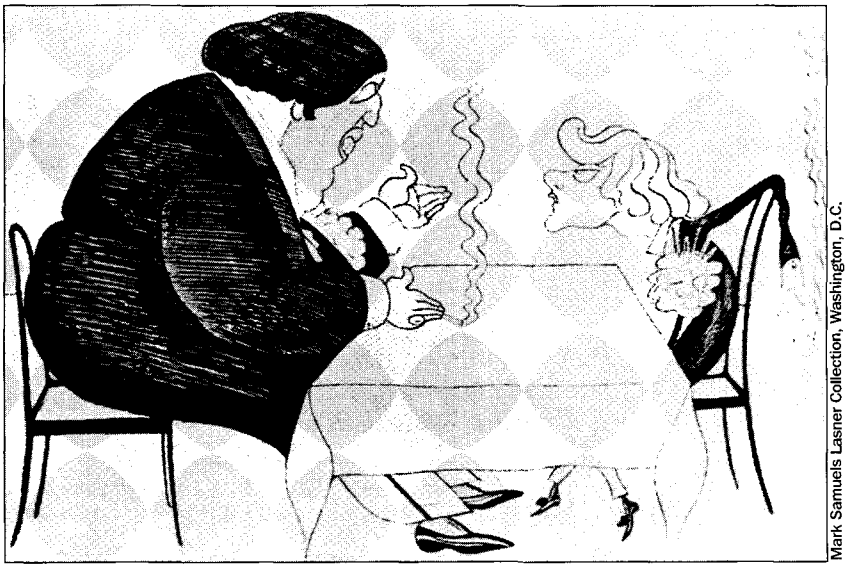
beg for close inspection. And upon that inspection, Wilde proves prosecutable on purely intellectual grounds. As much as some of his writing celebrates decency, generosity, and kindness, most of it constitutes a giddy attack. Wilde was a cultural aristocrat who made it his business to injure the culture that made him so interesting, and he did much to kill the things he loved.

Wilde could write at times like a sappy Aesop with a heart of gold. The best of his fables show that, at some strange remove from the heterosexual-baiting of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, he had all the traits of a good children's writer: sweet, awe-inspired, colorful, and poetic.

In "The Selfish Giant," for example, a misanthropic giant expels a group of children playing in his garden—whereupon his beautiful yard is frozen in permanent winter. It is not until the children sneak back that spring returns, and, in perfect fairy-tale fashion, the giant realizes his folly in trying to enjoy his garden alone. But the story then takes a sudden and—for our contemporary picture of Wilde—very strange turn. Though the reformed giant plays with all the children in his garden, he doesn't see the first little boy he welcomed until one day, years later, when the boy returns with injured hands and feet:

> "Who hath dared to wound thee?" cried the Giant; "tell me that I may take my big sword and slay him."
>
> "Nay!" answered the child: "but these are the wounds of Love."
>
> "Who art thou?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child.
>
> And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, "You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise."
>
> And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.

George Bernard Shaw once called Wilde "Nietzschean," but Nietzsche is hard to see in a story like "The Selfish Giant."



Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, Washington, D.C.

Max Beerbohm's caricature of Wilde and the Marquis of Queensberry's son, Lord Alfred Douglas—of whom Wilde said, "He once played dice with his father for my life, and lost."

Similarly, in "The Happy Prince," a gold-plated statue with sapphires for eyes and a ruby in his sword sends a swallow to give his gold and jewels away to the poor and destitute of the city. And after all the gold plate and jewels are gone, the swallow, who had planned to fly south for winter but stayed to assist the prince, freezes to death. But at the story's end—in another unexpectedly Christian twist—the town councilors, seeing that the prince has lost all his luster, decide to melt him down:

> "What a strange thing!," said the overseer of the workmen at the foundry. "This broken heart will not melt in the furnace. We must throw it away." So they threw it on a dust-heap where the dead swallow was also lying.
>
> "Bring me the two most precious things in the city," said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird."
>
> "You have rightly chosen," said God, "for in my garden of paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me."

A man who's capable of having one of his characters pronounce, "You should study the Peerage, Gerald. It is . . . the best thing in fiction the English have ever done," as Wilde did in *A Woman of No Importance*, is capable of enormous flippancy. But there's little evidence in his fables that his flippancy extends to God. Most critics want to dismiss Wilde's religious leanings: Ellmann declares that the fables "suffer from florid figures . . . and biblical pronouns." But parents looking for religious stories to read to their children could do far worse.

Even *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (which, because of its not-too-hidden homosexual themes, was used against Wilde at trial) proceeds on the assumption that man has a soul that bears witness to every wrong he commits. The plot also assumes, not without humor, that immoral people are ugly. When Basil Hallwood paints a marvelous picture of the young, handsome Dorian Gray, Dorian wishes he could remain forever as he looks in the portrait. His wish granted, Dorian begins a life of incredible vice, remaining always handsome while the painting gets uglier and uglier. Several years, several murders, and many unspeakable sins later, Dorian Gray kills Basil Hallwood, and then—stabbing the portrait—kills himself.

In the preface to *Dorian Gray*, Wilde wrote, "There is no such thing

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as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all." When his novel became evidence at his trial, however, he begged his friend Frank Harris to testify that it was indeed moral. Its morality is interesting. The plot is a cautionary tale aimed against those whom Wilde most resembled: witty urbane types, socialites free from the obligations of family and work, completely unburdened people whom he would elsewhere describe as perfect. Dorian's life, luxurious and free, makes rich soil for soul-killing vanity. *Dorian Gray* can even be read as a critique of the aesthetic, art-for-art's-sake movement of which Wilde was the most famous proponent.

In similar ways, Wilde's work after his imprisonment—his long, sing-songy *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and his strangely uninformative apologia, *De Profundis*—can be included in the never-to-be-published anthology of "The Moral Writings of Oscar Wilde." But most of the rest of his work counts against him. *The Importance of Being Earnest* clearly shows Wilde's runaway instinct for satire: "Clever as it was," George Bernard Shaw said, "it was his first really heartless play." The entire action turns on two young men who use false identities to cover up their philandering. Endlessly mocking marriage, the script was an enormous success:

> *Algernon:* In married life, three is company and two is none.
> *Jack:* That my dear young friend is the theory that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.
> *Algernon:* Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half that time.

By the second act, of course, Algernon is ready to marry a girl he has known for only an hour, and romance rises from the ashes of cynicism. The frenetic scenes that make Wilde's play a traditional farce—with its impossible coincidences and incredible good fortune—arise not from the characters who are at times indistinguishably witty in the Wildean manner, but from the melodramatic plot. It is as though Wilde had made a deal with the audience to insult them and then pretend he hadn't, while they pretended there had been no insult in the first place.

Ellmann argues that Wilde's prose genius surfaced with such essays as "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," a mock-sensitive description of a real-life artist and poisoner named Thomas Griffiths Wainewright. Wilde describes the writer's artistic evolution from painting as a child to reading Whitman as a young soldier. After describing Wainewright's (minor) literary accomplishments—including the very Wildean aphorism, "I hold that no work of art can be tried otherwise than by laws deduced from itself: whether or not it is consistent with itself is the question"—Wilde gives a detailed account of the artist's career as a poisoner. Wainewright, in his murderous way, actualized his potential much as an artist creates his art: "He recognized that Life itself is an art, and has its modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it." Of the murders Wainewright committed, Wilde adds, "There is no essential incongruity between crime and culture." There was even artistic sensibility in the killings. A friend once demanded an explanation for the last of his victims. "Yes, it was a dreadful thing to do," Wainewright agreed, "but she had very thick ankles."

WILDE WAS NEVER EXACTLY SERIOUS, BUT HE WAS NEVER EXACTLY HARMLESS EITHER.

This is Wilde at his amoral best, out to shock. And yet, even here he makes a curious attempt to defend the morality of his amoral view, arguing that history cannot corrupt, therefore we should not mar its hilarity or viciousness with moral judgment. But one cannot avoid thinking that Wilde respects Wainewright both as an artist and a man—for Wainewright fulfilled his personality in its artistic as well as its murderous bent.

Wilde was never exactly serious, but he was never exactly harmless either. In "The Critic as Artist," a dialogue between a literal-minded nabob and a caricature of Wilde, the inspired but sophistic style of the author is given full range. The Wilde character recreates, after many departures and much sarcasm, the view of Matthew Arnold about the importance of criticism to culture: "It is Criticism, as Arnold points out, that creates the intellectual atmosphere of the age. It is Criticism, as I hope to point out myself some day, that makes the mind a fine instrument."

Though he often praised other arts, Wilde actually knew little besides literature. "Wilde started as an apostle of Art," George Bernard Shaw observed; "in that capacity, he was a humbug." Even his sympathetic early biographer Frank Harris admitted, "Wilde continually pretended to a knowledge of music which he had not got." And the result is that criticism turns into a caricature of Wilde himself: the self-creation of the individual through skillful play with language.

The Wilde character argues that criticism, like murder in Wainewright's case, is the art of self-expression. And the highest criticism is "the record of one's own soul." Such criticism proves not to be about accuracy, but about the ability to incite the imagination of others. Self-knowledge is jettisoned in favor of self-creation—the painting of a picture of the self for others to see. Oscar Wilde does have his descendants around today, but they are not necessarily the homosexuals who want to claim him: The body piercers, con-

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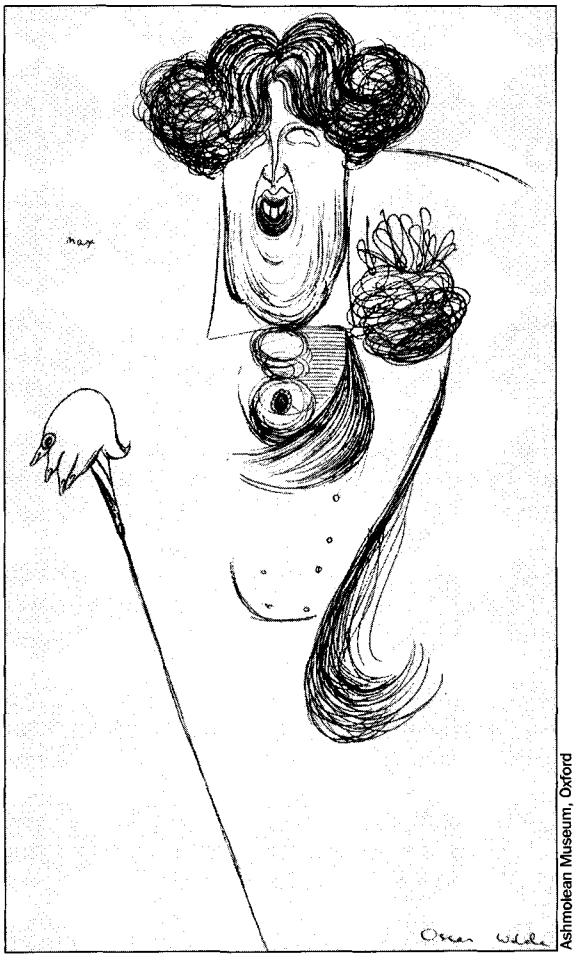
fessional performance artists, and creators of Internet personas all share Wilde's vision of the self unreal except in the eyes of others.

"When we reach the true culture that is our aim," the Wilde character says in "The Critic as Artist," "we attain to that perfection of which the saints have dreamed, the perfection of those to whom sin is impossible . . . because they can do everything they wish without hurt to the soul." The same wish for a world beyond morality appears in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," an essay he decided to write after hearing George Bernard Shaw lecture on the subject and one of the few moments in which Wilde wrote with a sincere effort to persuade.

"The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is undoubtedly the fact that Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon everybody," he starts off in the paradoxical form beloved by Shaw, G. K. Chesterton, and nearly every other late-Victorian writer. Wilde's socialism has its admirers. Christopher Hitchens declared in a 1988 column in the *Nation* that Wilde sought something greater than the "compassion" run hollow by modern Democrats: "If we see a slum, a ghetto, a beggar, or an old person eating pet food, we should not waste pity on the victim. We should want the abolition of such conditions for our own sakes. The burden of enduring them is too much."

Wilde's socialism, however, was the result not of solidarity with the poor, but of contempt for them. After arguing that charity merely prolongs poverty "by keeping the poor alive, or, in the case of the very advanced school, by amusing the poor," Wilde claims, "It is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property. It is immoral and unfair." He had no faith in the dignity of man apart from material circumstances: "Wealthy people are, as a class, better than impoverished people, more moral and more intellectual." This is socialism untouched by love for mankind.



Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Max Beerbohm's mocking of Wilde at his peak, 1894.

In one of his cruelest, funniest bits of criticism, Wilde quipped that the painter James Whistler "always spelt art, and we believe still spells it, with a capital 'I.'" But socialism for Wilde turns out to mean only individualism, and "the most intense form of individualism" turns out to mean only art, and being an artist turns out to mean only being a witty manipulator of language who creates himself in the eyes of the public—which is to say, someone like Wilde. The importance of socialism, for Oscar Wilde, means the importance of being Oscar Wilde.

A more specious defense of a political philosophy would be hard to find, but it is the summit of his attempts to think his way through his ideas, and it raises what ought to be a serious question: Why celebrate Wilde?

His current promoters—those who insist on using Wilde to bring about a cultural confrontation with homosexuality—have for the most part simply ignored his work. But it is, of course, that work which earns him a right to our consideration. And any fair evaluation will recognize that Wilde was a writer of enormous gifts, a minor classic of English literature. His writing remains charming and sunny and possessed of a wit so genuine it could not be wrecked even by his lapses into melodrama, over-writing, and lugubrious sentimentality.

A fair evaluation of his writing, however, will also reveal that he was not much of a thinker. Most of the time his thoughts were chaotic; when he tried to comb them out, he succeeded only in tangling them more; and when at last the reader straightens them for him, they prove to have been horrible thoughts to begin with. We should remember that the confused perniciousness of Wilde's life is not enough to ruin the literary wonders of his work. But we should also keep in mind that the wonder of Wilde's work is not enough to redeem the confused perniciousness of his ideas. ♦

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THE MOST PRESUMPTUOUS BRANCH

The Costs of an Imperious Judiciary

By John J. Dilulio Jr.

Last year, Philadelphia had over four hundred homicides, 82 percent by guns—the highest percentage of any big city in the country. And yet, only 7 percent of weapons arrests made by Philly police in recent years have resulted in significant jail sentences for gun-toting, repeat criminals. The city may have a tough-on-crime mayor, a strong district attorney's office, a reinvigorated police department, and a growing number of community-based prevention programs. But they have proved at last no match for Philadelphia's criminal-court judges who fail—whether through incompetence, inability to understand the damage done to their city, or entrenched bias—to enforce the law. When a judge lets an armed repeat offender go because (as he explained to a local reporter) it was "only a gun case," something is deeply out of order.

Of course, even if the city's judges improved, federal judges could still make it impossible to crack down on weapons. When a micro-managing federal judge imposed an arbitrary jail cap on Philadelphia, the order resulted during an eighteen-month period in the release of 9,732 defendants who used their court-ordered freedom to commit hundreds of violent crimes—including 79 murders and 264 gun-law violations. One of the shooting victims was a rookie patrol officer and son of a highly decorated veteran police detective.

Someone who understands the extent to which America's courts are responsible for conditions like those in Philadelphia is Max Boot, an editorial-page editor at the *Wall Street Journal*. His provocative and beautifully written new book, *Out of Order: Arrogance, Corruption, and Incompetence on the Bench*, sets out to explain how—in a profound derangement of our constitutional order—the emergence of a "juristocracy" and "government by consent decree" has permitted judges at all levels to menace the public good and raid the public purse.

Max Boot
Out of Order
Arrogance, Corruption, and Incompetence on the Bench
Basic, 256 pp., $25.00

In the seventy-eighth of the *Federalist Papers*, Alexander Hamilton argued that the judiciary was the national government's "least dangerous branch"—the branch least likely ever to become the locus of concentrated power exercised contrary to the interests of the people. Dismissing anti-federalist warnings, Hamilton virtually laughed off the fear (articulated most powerfully by the anti-federalist who wrote under the pseudonym Brutus) that in years to come, ever more imperious judges—breaking free of constitutional checks and balances, yet remaining insulated on the bench from both popular pressures and the adverse consequences of their own decrees—would act with impunity against the public interest and common good.

Today, most judges, including those on the federal bench, are mindful of the proper limits of their constitutional authority. Most judges, most of the time, are generally respectful of the lawmaking prerogatives of the people's duly elected representatives. Some judges are arrogant, corrupt, incompetent, or worse, but most are not. So much of the daily work of the courts is now a bureaucratized processing of cases that the judiciary's main problems are mundanely administrative, not monumentally constitutional. And, as such law professors as Robert Katzmann have argued persuasively, there may yet be ways of improving judicial decision-making and the working relationships between legislators and judges.

Still, after reading Max Boot, it is impossible to conclude that Brutus was wrong. In his foreword to *Out of Order*, former judge Robert H. Bork minces even fewer words than usual about our imperious judiciary. "Our courts are behaving badly," he declares flatly. Absolutely "nothing in the Constitution" supports several recent Supreme Court decisions. Instead, these decisions are simply "illegitimate exercises of power" which demonstrate that the "Supreme Court is an active partisan on one side of our culture wars." And the Supreme Court is not alone. Jurists generally "are drawn from and respond to the intellectual class" and believe "their own views are superior, more civilized and just, than those of the public" or elected officials. Today's "intellectual class" is not the business class or the made-it-to-college working class but the chattering class of irreligious university-bred elites who imbibe "radical individualism" with a chaser of "radical egalitarianism." The federalists who did not see these judges coming, and the Founding Fathers who banked on "judicial modesty," were wrong: Boot's book, rules Bork, is a true indictment of contemporary "judicial arrogance."

Following several hard-hitting chapters on criminal law, Boot chronicles the follies of judges who have taken over schools, awarded outra-

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geous liability awards, coerced cities into building low-income public housing, established special rights for homosexuals, trifled with states' rights, summarily vacated the results of voter initiatives, or engaged in outright corruption. Several passages of the book are stand-alone gems. In the chapter "Screening Rooms and Swimming Pools," the author documents how a federal judge's "fit of gavelitis" helped wreck Kansas City schools at a court-imposed cost of nearly $2 billion over more than a decade.

Boot's discussion of the ways in which judges have stacked the legal deck in favor of on-demand, any-trimester abortions is good, though too brief. For the next edition of *Out of Order*, he should address the deadly judicial politics of partial-birth abortion, the never-medically-necessary procedure in which a living human child has its brains sucked out by a licensed physician. The procedure is strongly opposed by solid majorities of citizens of every race, region, and religion. But when, for example, New Jersey's legislature overrode Republican governor Christie Todd Whitman's veto and outlawed partial-birth abortions, a federal judge immediately issued a restraining order barring the state from implementing its ban of the murderous procedure.

Wisely, Boot avoids the notion, popular among many conservatives during the 1980s, that Republican political victories would lead inexorably to a federal bench with greater judicial restraint. Republican presidents, governors, and legislatures did make a difference, but they hardly reversed the tide of juristocracy: As early as 1990, Republican-appointed judges were almost as prone as their Democratic-appointed counterparts to intervene as activists in prison-reform cases.

In his concluding chapter, Boot outlines proposals for "dethroning the juristocracy." He discusses the pros and cons of mandating judicial term limits, requiring three-judge panels to issue injunctions against the implementation of voter initiatives, picking state and federal judges with greater care, creating systems to rate judges, putting cameras in courtrooms, amending the Constitution (as Judge Bork desires) to make court decisions subject to legislative revision by a majority vote, and giving judges less public approbation (a concluding passage is headed "Laugh at Him"). Boot also weighs various proposals for removing from the purview of the lower federal courts constitutional challenges to state and federal laws.

None of these proposals is likely to take hold. It's true that Congress has authority to decide what shall be the entire jurisdiction of the lower federal courts and the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. Congress can alter the composition of the judiciary and the number of judges. It can impeach judges, too. But with exceptions that can be counted on the fingers of one hand, the post-1994 Congress has done nothing of lasting consequence to check the imperious judiciary. Besides, even if Congress did act, state courts have already gone well beyond the federal courts in mandating state Medicaid financing of abortions, equal spending among school districts, and numerous other areas.

In the end, we are left with Bork's observation that the "courts respond to the dominant social and cultural forces in American life." Our contemporary courts are out of order because our present-day intellectual culture is out of order. It is a culture that has attempted to marginalize religion even though most Americans not only believe in God but believe that religion is vital to addressing contemporary problems. It is likewise a culture that has distorted the meaning of our representative democracy by forgetting or denying that the Founders rightly sought to check the will of temporary, factious majorities only the better to empower the will of persistent, nonfactious majorities.

Out of Order explains well how this corrupting intellectual culture has codified itself in public law through the agency of judges. What the book does not show is the way back. Perhaps there is none—short of the long, hard task of completely reforming our intellectual culture. But the first step in any task is understanding why we have to undertake it, and in his trenchant new book Max Boot has made clear for the ordinary reader the costs of our imperious judiciary. ♦

GODZILLA VS. THE ANGEL

The Moviegoer's Diary Chronicles the Decline of Movies for Men

By John Podhoretz

SUNDAY, MAY 24. I'm at an old movie house in Brooklyn, the kind that people used to call a "nabe"—a neighborhood theater, far removed from the grand palaces downtown, where moviegoers went to see a double-feature with a cartoon and a newsreel for a quarter. But there are no double-features anymore, and everything that plays at the present-day movie palaces now shows simultaneously in the nabes. It's Day Five

A contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, *John Podhoretz edits the editorial pages of the* New York Post.

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of *Godzilla*, the $160 million monster movie that opened on 7,363 screens, and I kept insisting to my Brooklyn friend that we had better order tickets by phone because it was sure to be sold out. "Nothing sells out in Cobble Hill," he said, and he was right.

But he was also wrong, because *Godzilla* was *supposed* to sell out everywhere it showed. Sony Pictures arranged that *Godzilla* would be showing on one of every five movie screens in the United States to take advantage of those sellouts. That's why it was made; indeed, it's the only reason *Godzilla* was made: Nobody was compelled to remake a 1954 Japanese-American hybrid about a dinosaur that stomps on Tokyo.

But the original *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* and its sequels have played on television for decades now, and thus Godzilla has something studios usually need to pay tens of millions of dollars to create: name recognition. What could be better, after *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World*, than a movie about a dinosaur with a famous name made by the two men responsible for *Independence Day*? It would be tempting to say root-canal surgery, except that after an excruciating ninety minutes, *Godzilla* has an entertaining last half-hour.

But unlike *Independence Day*, which was a high-spirited romp of a war movie, *Godzilla* is glum, dank, and bizarre. In the course of *Godzilla*, probably one hundred thousand people are killed as the dinosaur attacks New York, but we see only a couple of deaths. Otherwise, Godzilla just runs and runs through a tiresome maze that is supposedly the East Side of Manhattan photographed from above, and you never quite get a handle on how big he actually is. At one point, you would think he's about sixty feet tall, at another about a hundred and twenty. He seems able to breathe fire like a dragon, but since he does it only twice, maybe it was just a car blowing up near him.

The natives are restless at the 8:25 showing of *Godzilla* in this Brooklyn nabe. They keep stomping up the aisle to get candy or go to the bathroom. This kind of activity in the middle of a movie is so rare that you can tell everybody is feeling gypped, particularly since—though it's a beautiful day in the real New York—the onscreen city is as rainy and dark as Seattle (the better to hide the cheesy special effects). My sister told me that her thirteen-year-old son isn't very excited about seeing *Godzilla*, and that's telling: If he isn't interested, who could be?

And why should he be interested? After all, the original *Godzilla* movies are among the most asinine films ever conceived—memorable only for their stupidity and the hilarious incompetence of their special effects. One thing Sony Pictures didn't count on is that sometimes name recognition isn't a good thing. Would anybody want to see *The Sidney Blumenthal Story*?

Monday, May 25. While *Godzilla* is tanking at the box office, there's a movie called *City of Angels* that has done better than anybody expected in the past few weeks. It's a metaphysical romance between a surgeon (played by Meg Ryan) who falls into despair after losing a patient on her operating table and the angel (Nicolas Cage) who comes to escort the soul of that patient to the afterlife.

It's soupy and drippy and humorless, but immensely entertaining because—in a world of *Godzillas*—a simple, cliché-ridden love story seems like a precious bauble. And even though the movie is about an angel and a surgeon, it at least features recognizable human emotions. *Godzilla* and the summer's other would-be blockbuster, the equally turgid *Deep Impact*, are about nothing but their special effects.

In the heyday of the Hollywood studio, back before demographics and market surveys, the powers-that-be divided the world into men and women—or, more precisely, into "men's pictures" and "women's pic-

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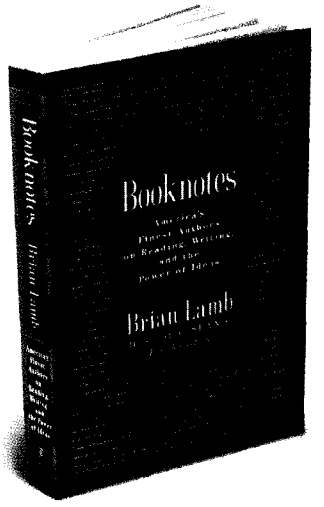

Which author was interviewed in the White House barber shop for a presidential staff position?
See page 240

Which acclaimed historian frequently writes in the nude?
See page 11

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TIMES BOOKS

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tures." Men were the primary audience for most of the so-called "genre" films: the gangster movies, the westerns. The only genre that appealed to women was the musical, but there was also a generic "women's picture," what the slangy show-biz weekly *Variety* called a "weepie." The classic weepies are such films as *Stella Dallas*, in which a loving but slutty mother gives up her beloved daughter to the girl's rich father, and *Dark Victory*, in which Bette Davis discovers she is dying and finds true love before she meets her Maker.

These weepies are so overdrawn and manipulative that they have become totems of the ironic pseudo-religion called Camp, and most men hated them. In the pictures aimed at men, all emotions except hate were suppressed. The proper response to the gunsel who growled, "Why, I oughta fill ya full a lead," was "Oh yeah?" The ideal man in a men's picture was self-contained, a cowboy who needed his horse more than a woman.

The old-fashioned men's pictures were plain, while the women's pictures were operatic. That's why the men's pictures generally strove for realism, while the women's pictures came across as stylized. But that has all been turned on its head nowadays. The pictures made to appeal to a male audience, like *Godzilla*, are all outsized and sensational: Their purpose is to make you feel as though you've been on a rollercoaster. It's the women's pictures that at least try to tell stories about real people, even when they feature special effects or gimmicky plots.

Another (and far superior) new women's picture, the delightful *Sliding Doors*, features a radiant Gwyneth Paltrow as a Londoner whom we watch leading alternate lives—one in which she catches a train and finds her boyfriend in bed with another woman, and another in which she misses the train and thus remains in the dark about his affair. The supernatural gimmick doesn't take away from the movie's very believable human dramas.

Of course, the most memorable movies transcend the gender divide. *Gone with the Wind* was basically a collaboration between the great women's-picture director George Cukor—who was fired because he was a homosexual and Clark Gable couldn't stand him—and the men's-picture director Victor Fleming. Cukor filmed the early scenes with Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara in all her petulant glory, the stuff that made *Gone with the Wind* the ultimate women's picture. Fleming caught Gable's rapscallion charm and offhand bravery, not to mention the grand scope of the Civil War—the stuff that made *Gone with the Wind* the ultimate men's picture as well.

Now, of course, movies are made for boys and girls, not men and women. Just as advertisers crave a youth market because kids are malleable and easily influenced, so film marketers crave a youth audience because they hope to put out the kind of film (*Titanic* and *Star Wars* being the best examples) that will so capture a teenager's imagination that he will see it fifty times.

That's why, in 1998, any adult male who likes to go to the movies to see an involving story about characters who bear even the most passing resemblance to real people has no choice but to attend films his fathers and grandfathers wouldn't have been caught dead seeing at the local nabe—or anywhere else, for that matter. ♦

JUMP, JIVE, AND WAIL

Why Conservatives Should Celebrate the Return of Swing

By Mark Gauvreau Judge

As a leading cultural indicator, it doesn't rank up there with the national drop in crime. But it's close.

For the last few years, America has experienced a revival in swing dancing. Big bands and young neo-swing "jump and jive" groups like the Cherry Poppin' Daddies—who are currently receiving airplay on rock radio and selling ten thousand copies a week of their *Zoot Suit Riot* album—are once again playing the music of Count Basie, Glenn Miller, Louis Jordan, and Cab Calloway in clubs and ballrooms jammed to the walls with jitterbuggers, most of them in their teens, twenties, and thirties. Indeed, the phenomenon has gotten so big that the Gap clothing store is running an ad featuring jitterbuggers lindy-hopping to Louis Prima's 1956 "Jump, Jive, and Wail."

This is good news for conservatives. If swing takes over pop culture the way rock-and-roll did in the early 1950s, it could do more to repair the cultural damage of the last thirty years than the war on drugs, the Republican Congress, and the Christian Coalition combined. To understand why, one has only to step inside the Derby in Los Angeles, the Spanish Ballroom outside Washington, D.C., or any of the other swing clubs that have popped up across the country. When one sees the fedoras, saddle shoes, well-mannered patrons, and general air of civility, it becomes apparent that swing has resurrected the night spot as an adult

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playground where anything less than strict decency is forbidden and shabby manners and dress are frowned upon.

At a restaurant called America in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, the Friday night big-band dance draws two to three hundred people, an interesting throng of teenagers and twenty-somethings mixed with senior citizens as well as Gen-X'ers (the baby-boomers, the generation of rock-and-roll, are conspicuously missing), and in over a year there has not been a single report of drunkenness, sexual assault, or even a fight. Unlike the rock-and-rollers who display the civil and sartorial nightmare that is one of the worst legacies of the 1960s, swing dancers like to look and act better than anyone in the room.

If, as some conservatives believe, manners and morals are as important as rights, this is no small thing. In *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (1995) the social critic Christopher Lasch noted that one of the worst changes to occur in America since the 1950s is the loss of what the sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined in 1989 the term "third place" to describe. Third places are those casual spots outside both work and home: city taverns, tea gardens, post offices, beauty parlors, and dance halls where citizens can meet, talk, and have fun. Third places foster conversation with strangers and allow mingling between the generations, something now almost completely lost. "Young people used to be more actively involved in the adult world," Lasch wrote. "They had more opportunities to observe adults in unguarded moments. Today it is the young who are professionally observed by an army of well-meaning adults, in settings deliberately set aside for pedagogical purposes."

What is remarkable about a good third place—which the new swing clubs have the chance to become—is the way they encourage our better natures without the intervention of government, academics, or the helping professions. Oldenburg argues that in third places a kind of natural restraint holds sway and "whatever hint of hierarchy exists is predicated upon human decency" rather than wealth or fame.

Oldenburg goes on to note that this decency often spills into the larger community:

> Promotion of decency in the third place is not limited to it. The regulars are not likely to do any of those things roundly disapproved at the coffee counter. Many items of proper and improper behavior are reviewed in the countless hours and open agenda of rambling third place conversations. A dim view is taken of people who let their property become an eyesore, of the less-than-human breed who would litter a parking lot with a used paper diaper, of the ethical moron who would look for a pretext to sue somebody in pursuit of unearned or undeserved money, or of someone guilty of not meeting parental duties or responsibilities.

That's what's so exciting about the return of swing from the 1930s and '40s: It suggests the possibility of a return of civilized third places. Dancing by its very nature brings one in contact with a large number of people, but the unwritten laws—encouraged by the high-style of dress and dance—make debauchery unlikely and provide a sense of safety. Like James Q. Wilson's "Broken-Windows" theory of maintaining social control by preventing small crimes, when a certain level of appearance and etiquette is established, larger problems become less imaginable. For the most part, this kind of control has been missing since youth took over bars and converted dance halls into pot-heavy concert spaces.

In the days before rock-and-roll, welfare, and midnight basketball, it was in places like dance halls that kids learned how to behave as members of a larger adult community, and the disappearance of such spots is a large factor in the social chaos that has taken over the country in the last thirty years.

In 1995, there aired a documentary *Swingin' at the Savoy*, about legendary dancer Frankie Manning and the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, one of the great dance floors in America before it was demolished to put up a housing project in 1959. It is striking how well-adjusted and optimistic the kids who grew up dancing at the Savoy were, despite the fact that most of them were black and had to struggle through the Great Depression. "We would go to the Savoy in the daytime and dance with the band while they rehearsed," recalls Manning, who danced at the Savoy during the 1930s and is still dancing at age 84. "Then we'd go home, take a shower and come back at night to dance. It was a wonderful life." Manning had no social workers or government programs to help him fill time; his mentor was Count Basie, who steered the other dancers away from drinking and other destructive behavior.

Perhaps a small, apparently meaningless pop fad like swing could provide the push that helps re-civilize the culture. Imagine what might happen if swing got so big that it once again became the norm rather than the exception. School children would learn how to dance instead of gawking at the Internet. Soon they'd be dressing well and frowning upon rudeness, drunkenness, and vulgarity.

The prominent black social critic Stanley Crouch recently claimed that if all teen-age girls simply refused to date boys who dressed like pigs, we could re-moralize the culture in one generation. We could at least make the culture better dressed, and that's a step. It's only rational to speculate that swing itself is just the latest fad, and that next year the kids will do something different. But judging by the swinging going on at the Derby, America, and other spots popping up across the country, there is at least a chance that we can dance our way into a miracle—the antidote to the past thirty years. ♦

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Independent counsel Kenneth Starr is considering launching his own Internet Web site. —*News Item*

Parody

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"Thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble." — Exodus 15:7

KEN STARR HOME PAGE

AP Photo/Leslie E. Kossoff

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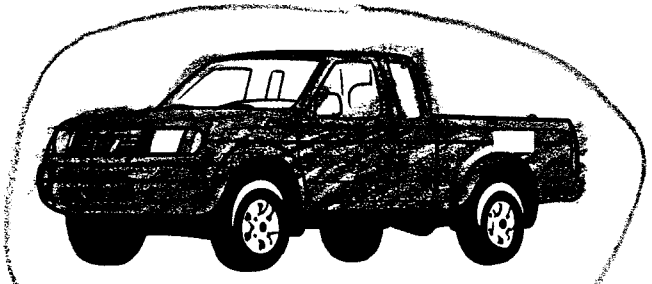

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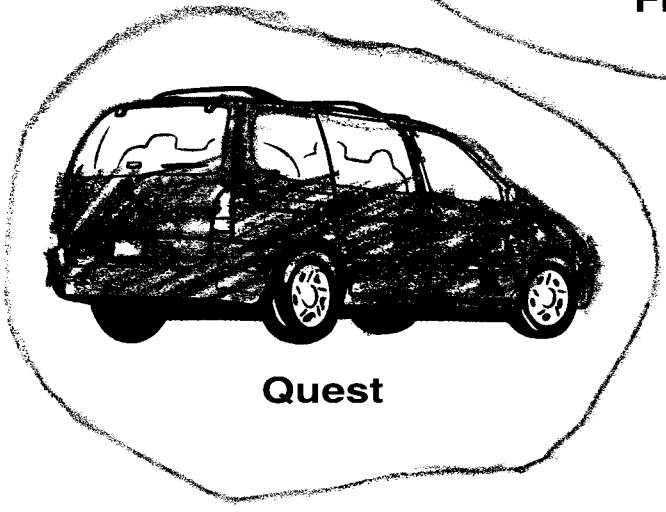

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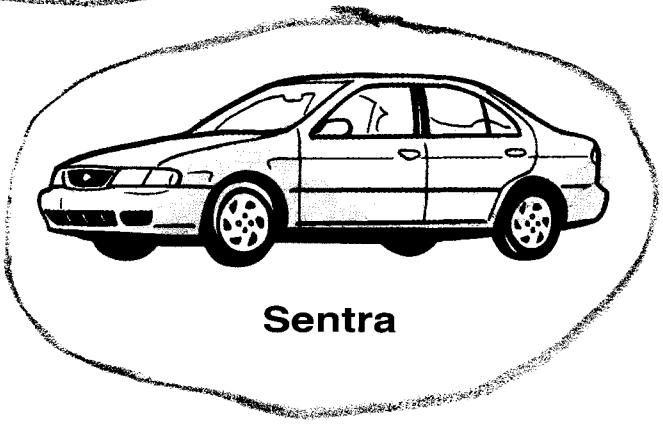

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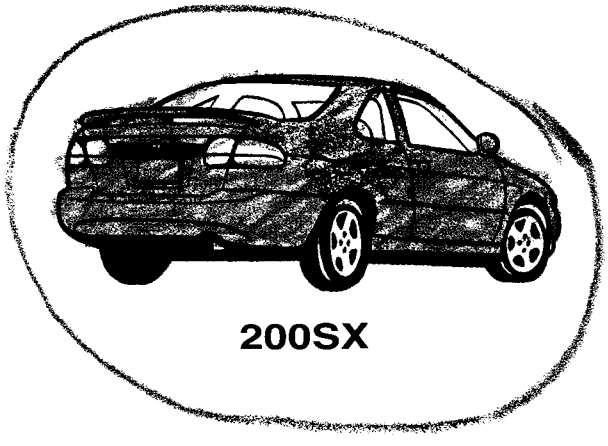

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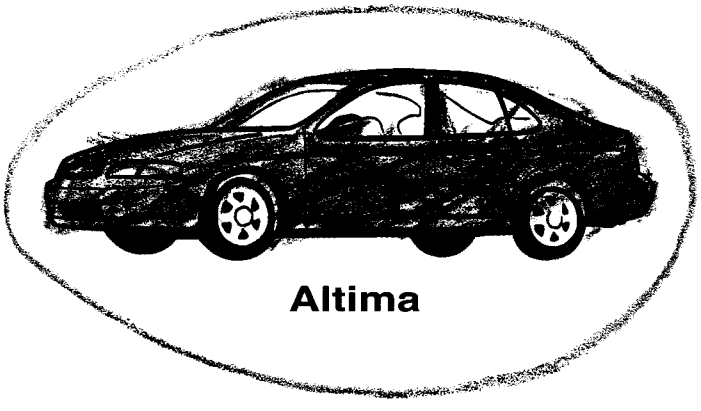

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